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By Robert Ormond Case

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Vol. LXXVII Contents for April 14, 1928 No. 3

ONE NOVEL

**North of Jump-Off** . . . . *Robert Ormond Case* . **3**

TWO SERIALS

**Thunder Brakes** . . . . *Cherry Wilson* . . **49**
A Five-part Story—Part Two

**The Path to Plunder** . . . *Max Brand* . . . **75**
A Six-part Story—Part Five

SEVEN SHORT STORIES

**All Black** . . . . . *Hugh F. Grinstead* . **41**
**Peg Leg Saves the Doctor's Fee** . *F. R. Buckley* . . **65**
**Who Poached on the Poachers** . *Ray Humphreys* . . **96**
**While They Waited for Help** . . *Harley P. Lathrop* . **102**
**Dad Simms Takes a Short Cut** . *Frank Richardson Pierce* **111**
**Unloaded for Bear** . . . . *Roland Krebs* . . **117**
**That Biggest Fish** . . . . *Seth Ranger* . . . **124**

ONE ARTICLE

**Metals of the West** . . . *Thomas R. Best* . . **131**
(Quicksilver)

MISCELLANEOUS

Birds of the West and North America (The Kingbird) . . . . . 40
The Rescue of a Brave Eskimo Woman . . 64 Saved by Three Heroes . . . . . 141
Mushroom Growth of Texas Towns . . 110
Indian Dirge for Wild West Showman . . 116
Where Airplanes Failed . . . . . 123

DEPARTMENTS

**The Round-up** . . . . *The Editor* . . **133**
**The Hollow Tree** . . . . *Helen Rivers* . . **136**
**Where to Go and How to Get There** *John North* . . **139**
**Missing** . . . . . **142**

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# Western Story
## Magazine
EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXXVII | April 14, 1928 | No. 3

# North of Jump-Off

## By Robert Ormond Case

*Author of "Windy's Overgrown Pet," etc.*

### CHAPTER I.

#### WHERE TRAILS END.

TO experienced eyes, his status would immediately have been fixed. He was a stranger to the ways of the North. The fact of his being abroad in the arctic night, alone, on foot, with no dog team following as he broke the trail, with the world snowbound for three months past and a storm brewing in the giant ramparts that stand guard over Mackenzie and Yukon, would have been evidence enough.

Also, his manner of wielding his snowshoes was clumsy. He lifted them too high, swung them too wide. This was wasted energy, which was wasted life; for presently, growing tired, the heat of his body would wane. Near the arctic circle, in midwinter, man's guard against an environment not intended for man is the strength that is in bone and sinew, and his ability to keep warm.

There were no human eyes to watch him. Men of experience were divided into two classes; those who went "outside" and those who "holed up" for the winter. He pushed forward alone

through the gray twilight, against the eternal wind, where the world sloped upward in an unending white whose sameness was that of death itself; a dark figure in the lifeless gloom despite the fine, crystalline particles of snow that clung to parka and mukluks and drifted in crevices and folds of the pack on his shoulders.

Many eyes watched him as he plodded forward, knee-deep in streamers of snow that whipped with the icy current down from the ridges and swirled in the drifted hollows. They were slanting eyes; and short, triangular ears were alert to mark his passing, while keen nostrils quivered as his scent came down with the wind. The stranger was unaware of being under observation. An experienced one, knowing it, would have seen nothing. On the trail below Jump-off, even in midwinter, the wolves north of the Cariboos are wary. Bellying in a hollow, like yet another indistinguishable segment of gray shadow, flattening against a rocky ledge, sinking, wraithlike in the streamers of driving snow, they see and are unseen.

Thus, while the stranger believed himself to be the sole sign of life that moved across the face of the land, there was much iron-sinewed and savage life about him. The wolves paralleled his course, trotted ahead to peer down at him from points of vantage, circled and snarled among themselves, and returned again. Sinister purpose did not flame as yet in their slanting, opalescent eyes. Their hackles were erect only against the cold. But the curiosity with which they watched his progress was rooted in famine.

Unaware of these things, the stranger plodded forward, his tall figure bowed a little because of the pack, the wind into which he penetrated, and the gradual up grade of the trailless slope. The wind was not of blizzard proportions. It was strong, steady, sweeping down from the mountains like a chill tide. It was not falling snow that streamed and wavered across the hogbacks and eddied in the hollows, but crystalline particles borne on the icy current, hard as fine sand and infinitely more cold. The blizzard itself yet slumbered among the iron peaks that had given it birth. The lower ramparts of those peaks were visible, and the crests, etched in filmy outline against the frosty stars and the tremulous grandeur of the northern lights; but the awe-inspiring, almost vertical dimensions between rampart and crest were hidden beneath a cloud-like miasma that seemed, through the gray twilight, to have the substance of fog.

It might be hours before the blizzard, unchained, swept down to engulf the world. It might be minutes. Indians whose hunting trails led through that section of the Yukon in the vicinity of Jump-off did not stir abroad in midwinter when a storm was brewing at the top of the world, for their knowledge of the wild was an instinct born of generations of experience. White men, trappers and prospectors, whose wisdom was founded on less experience and more reason, remained behind stout cabin walls where fires roared. Far outside in the open during such an interval, when already it was cold beyond imagination, the thermometer dropped still lower, and as the mercury dropped, so the chances that human life might persist in the face of such odds, approached the minimum.

Unaware or defiant of these things, too, the stranger moved. No part of his flesh was exposed to the cold. The long fur of his parka protected and concealed his face, and huge mittens encased his hands. Despite protecting layers of fur and wool, and the pounding energy of his blood, built up through exertion, he had a mystifying sense that vitality was being drawn from him with each biting intake of breath. He flailed his arms at intervals as he pushed for-

ward, swung his snowshoes wider and accelerated his pace.

Presently, though he did not realize it, the wolves deployed outward as they paralleled his course. They watched from more distant ridges, floundered through drifts in the lee of higher slopes. The manifold scent of human habitation was coming down with the wind, including the acrid and terrifying odor of burning wood and the offensiveness of dogs.

Had he not literally stumbled upon Jump-off the stranger would not have known that his northeasterly course had led him to the last outer guard of the wilderness. Beneath the snow, the low buildings of the post were merely lesser contours against the rounded slope. Stone chimneys projected above the surface, and from two of these sparks trailed and blue smoke drifted, signs of human occupancy.

It chanced that because of the cold no dogs were abroad at the moment. Thus no savage hullabuloo greeted the stranger as he paused and looked down into a man-made trench excavated from doorway to doorway of two closely huddled buildings.

Only five men had wintered at Jump-off: The factor, McPherson, a dour and unsmiling person who, by judicious sampling of potent Hudson Bay rum, enlivened his term of servitude in the employ of the trading colossus of the North; two half-breed trappers, the swarthy brothers Le Duc; "Gold Tooth Charley," a grizzled sour dough whom winter had caught farther east than his usual stamping grounds, and "Shorty" Hoff, an adventurous freighter who had been persuaded because he made a fifth hand at poker to winter here rather than in the drizzle and fog of Prince Rupert.

It was Shorty, plunging forth bareheaded from one doorway preparatory to diving rabbitlike into the next, who chanced to glance upward toward the surface of the snow and saw the stranger looming motionless against the stars.

Notwithstanding that the cold bit into his unprotected features and frostbite could be expected in a matter of minutes, Shorty rubbed his watering eyes and peered again.

"Howdy!" he challenged. "Turn your dogs loose pardner, and climb down."

"I have no dogs," said the stranger, his voice muffled in his parka. He waved a mittened hand. "Is this Jump-off?"

"Correct," said Shorty, grinning.

But the stranger's reaction was even more baffling than his question had been. He shook his head slowly, as though in disappointment.

"I thought I was beyond Jump-off," he muttered. "What a remarkable coincidence! If I had tried to find the village, I would probably have missed it."

"Listen, 'Professor,' " Shorty dubbed him instantly, according to the custom of the North, by his outstanding characteristic—his well-modulated and precise mode of speaking. "Duck in and talk later, or there'll be a pair of us missing. There's places for genteel conversation, but this ain't one of 'em. This way, pardner, an' make it snappy, huh?"

Whereupon, his breath puffing about him in a powdery cloud, Shorty turned on his tingling heels and leaped back through the doorway he had just vacated. He stilled the shouts of protest at the partly open door by the terse statement that a stranger was without.

His four listeners gaped at him through the tobacco smoke that hung, foglike, above the red-bellied heater. Chairs scraped on the floor and the gaunt McPherson stooped automatically to retrieve the stone demijohn of "square-face" that had been placed for cautious motives of safety beneath his bunk for the night.

For some seconds all faced the door, waiting. But there came no slithering

of snow, as of one descending, nor the scraping of snowshoes. No sound came from without, save the muffled snarling of buried malemutes wrestling with their dreams, and the distant rumble of a snowslide in the iron peaks, borne down with the wind.

They eyed Shorty questioningly. That worthy, upon whom devolved the burden of proof, strode to the door and peered up. But the edge of the surface of the snow alone was outlined against a grayness that had obscured the stars. The stranger was gone. Where he had stood, larger particles of snow in thickening ranks were driving by with the storm.

In vain Shorty protested that but a moment before a man had loomed on the bank, alone, on snowshoes, with a pack on his back. His cronies professed to chuckle at the humorous aspects of this fanciful tale. When he insisted, they wagged their heads in solemn agreement, and recounted certain anecdotes tending to prove that even those of normal mentality were sometimes visited with hallucinations before the spring break-up. When he denounced them with pointed epithet and vehemently swore that he had, in fact, seen a man of flesh and blood, and had held converse with the stranger, they consented to don mackinaws and snowshoes and accompany him to the surface of the snow to observe the tracks of the mysterious one.

But there were no tracks. Already, while they had debated, the trail had vanished. Stooping in a swirl of snowflakes so dense that objects were obscured almost at arm's length, they found nothing to indicate that snowshoes had passed that way. Even as they shouted one to another, their own tracks smoothed out and merged into the endless white about them.

Shorty professed to detect the vague outline of long parallel grooves pointing northward. But they laughed him to scorn, and presently floundered back to the hospitality of stout walls and the red-bellied heater.

With public opinion thus against him, Shorty's own convictions wavered. Under the somewhat sardonic disbelief of his cronies, his brief encounter with the stranger began to assume an unreal quality. When McPherson passed around the demijohn, proceeding on the logical theory that had a newcomer in fact have appeared in their midst the occasion would have called for another drink, he was sure that he had held converse with a creature of his own imagination.

Yet, because he had imagination, Shorty shivered as he lowered the demijohn. Most men do, even hardened ones, who quaff Hudson Bay rum without a "chaser." But Shorty was thinking of the blizzard-swept slopes that extended northward beyond Jump-off.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE VOICE IN THE CAVE.

TWO hours north of Jump-off, the stranger staggered into a nichelike cleft in the base of a blue ice wall. He did not know that it was ice, nor that a crumbling moraine was beneath the blanket of snow that had cloaked the last heartbreaking slope. He had sensed only the sheer rampart looming at his elbow through the swirling chaos, and had turned aside with an instinctive yearning, in his extremity, for the shelter of living rock.

He had withstood the shock of the arctic storm, since leaving Jump-off, perhaps forty minutes longer than the man of average physique. He did not know this, being inexperienced, and for a moment stood swaying in the comparative quiet of his shelter with the air of one who battles with his own weakness. Head bowed, he peered about him.

On three sides, walls loomed, their crests obscured. Level footing was

underneath. At his back, a fanlike drift whose point began high on the outer edge of the wall sloped down to converge with the outer corner where wall and floor met. In this manner, the snow had drifted. It was obvious that it would not sift further into the niche during the progress of the storm.

With a sudden gesture, as of yielding to craven impulse, he drew off a mitten, fumbled rapidly with a shoulder strap, and allowed the pack to fall from his shoulders.

Obeying instinct rather than reason, he worked fast. Along the base of the wall he unrolled a sleeping bag, the major article of the pack. There was also a heavy leather case of boxlike contour. He squatted beside this, fumbled with the clasp, and threw back the lid. A small alcohol stove was revealed, a compact unit, with aluminum compartments and shining utensils in precise array.

Blowing on his numbing fingers, he extracted a match from a tiny receptacle and lighted the stove. The blue flame wavered, causing no illumination in the gloom. He spread his fingers above it, momentarily allowing bone and sinew to absorb the heat. Then he filled an aluminum cup with snow and placed it over the flame.

The snow melted rapidly and he replenished it until it brimmed with crystal water. From a condiment can be measured out two spoonfuls of black coffee. It soon simmered, and frail steam arose in white mist in the still air. From another receptacle he secured two lumps of sugar and stirred these in until the cubes had dissolved. Then he loosened his parka at the throat and with mittened hands raised the cup to his lips, first dashing some snow upon its brimming surface.

It was while he squatted thus, with the steaming cup upraised, his back to the wall and his eyes focused only vaguely upward at the sloping drift and the hurtling snow beyond, that he saw his first wolf.

Above the edge of the drift the shaggy head reared slowly, the triangular ears flattened a little with a show of caution, the slanting eyes unwinking and vaguely luminous as though, in their depths, strange fires waxed and waned. With the cup to his lips, the man peered up at this apparition fixedly. There was an unreal, ghostlike quality in its soundless appearance above the line of the drift, a gray motionless shadow that was foreign yet somehow akin to the swirling curtain that was its background.

Then he became aware that other eyes were peering down at him. More than one shaggy head was outlined against the twilight beyond. They were not motionless, like that of the first and highest wolf. They rose up slowly, slanting eyes stared down at him, then as slowly sank from view. It could not be said if there were few or many. It might be the same animals that rose up at intervals; there might be many others, bellying up from the rear, awaiting their turn, jostling for a point of vantage to observe him.

Turning his head slowly, the man's gaze followed down the drift. It was the last wolf in the watching line that told him the truth. Here were no ghostlike and fantastic creatures, born of his imagination, but animals of flesh and blood. Peering around the corner of the wall, this one stood. Half his broad, shaggy head was visible, an outline of bristling hackles beyond the triangular ear. Despite his caution, a bulging shoulder was in view, a thick powerful leg, and a broad, padded foot.

With an unhurried deliberation, the man drained the last of the coffee that was now no longer scorching. He set down the cup, drew off a mitten, and thrust his hand inside his parka. Somewhat clumsily, he drew forth a heavy, long-barreled revolver.

At the glint of metal, the wolves sank

back; but only for a moment. Again the shaggy leader reared up cautiously at the head of the drift. Another appeared below him, and another. The man disregarded these, and sighted his weapon at the corner of the wall. This last one, whose shoulder and leg he had seen, was on his own level and, therefore, if these animals were to be feared at all, the most menacing. At a glimpse of a shaggy body leaning out as before past the edge of the wall, he pulled the trigger.

The roar of the heavy weapon in the confined space was deafening. It seemed to shake the very wall at his back. From above, in fact, on the heels of the explosion, a sharp crack resounded. A loose fragment hurtled down from the eddying twilight and plunged into the drift. The man paid scant heed, beyond shrinking a little toward the wall.

Of major interest was the fact that the wolves were gone, erased from the picture by the flash and roar. A moment more he waited, but no animals appeared again. It had been mere curiosity, no doubt, that had led them to investigate his stronghold. Shrugging his shoulders, he replaced his weapon.

He eliminated the flame in the stove, rearranged and closed the case, removed his mukluks and stood, in heavy arctic socks, within the raised flap of the sleeping bag.

With no previous experience to guide him, he again acted instinctively in the apparently simple business of achieving the shelter of the sleeping bag with no loss of bodily heat. For though the cold, during the storm, was at a standstill, it was yet vital to life that the precious warmth of blood and body be retained. Stooping, he loosened his parka, and kept it wrapped about him while he removed his arms from the sleeves. Sinking to his knees, he insinuated himself into the bag, the parka sinking with him. It formed an additional covering when he was prone in the shelter.

Like a human cocoon he lay, fortified against hostile forces by layers of fur and wool. The bundle stirred uneasily, as in its depths he unbuckled the holster strap and drew the weapon up closer to head and hand.

Once he made a tiny opening to peer forth, and instantly, through this aperture, as through a joint in armor, the knifelike cold penetrated. In a swift glance he examined the line of the snowdrift against the storm. But he saw no wolves. They might be watching. He sensed, in fact, that he was being watched. But he saw nothing save a legion of snowflakes driving down parallel with the slope of the drift. He heard nothing save the whine of the wind and a remote sound as of rumbling thunder from the heights above.

For four hours he slept the utter sleep of exhaustion. From those dreamless depths he was lifted to instant wakefulness by a sharp tug on the parka above his head. The heavy garment moved a matter of inches, then was released. Lying without movement, listening, he heard a faint jumble of sounds. There were throaty snarls, whines, the pad-padding of restless feet and an indescribable sense of jostling and motion all about him.

Moving cautiously, he felt for his weapon. Despite the warmth of the sleeping bag, the metal of the revolver was searingly cold. His hand closed upon it. Tensing his muscles, he swept aside the protective coverings and reared up.

A huge wolf stood above him, almost at arm's length, it seemed, in that first photographic instant. Behind this one, and all about, crouched his fellows. The limitless area of the niche was alive with wolves. They were muscular, appalling animals at close range. The leader bounded back, light as thistledown, at the man's sudden upheaval. Behind

him the others crouched, heads lowered, lips writhing back from the fangs that gleamed in the half light.

Point-blank at the leader, the man discharged his weapon. It seemed inconceivable that even a clumsily directed bullet should fail to find a mark among those crouching bodies. But at the spurt of flame, as on the previous occasion, they melted before him like sparrows on the wing. The roar of the explosion drowned the sound of their going. There was a tremendous jostling of gray bodies, a flurry of snow as they leaped with incredible swiftness through the drift, and the cleft was empty.

Satisfying himself of the fact that the wolves were gone, the man rose up within his parka, drew on mukluks and mittens, and looked about him.

The blizzard had spent itself while he slept. Another was brewing to the north among the iron peaks. The tingling air breathed of still more bitter cold. Murky twilight cloaked the world as before, but of a different hue. The stars were more dim to the south, and along the horizon line was a faint glow. This meant, he knew, that in a more favored clime a thousand miles away it was dawn.

He turned back to his equipment, with the air of one who has tarried too long. He did not roll up his sleeping bag. He kicked his late shelter aside in a careless heap against the wall, and laced on his snowshoes. Straightening up, the leather case lay at his feet, Stooping and laying hold of it, he swung it in a semicircle, as though about to toss it forth into the snow; then hesitated. His eyes lighted on a small protuberance in the wall beside him, a tiny shelf at a height within his reach. Upon this he placed the case. Here the curious wolves could not reach it. Perhaps another pilgrim might pass this way.

He hesitated briefly over his revolver and holster. The last lap of his journey was at hand, and these things, like sleeping bag and condiment case, were excess baggage. He did not ponder long. No wolves were now in view, but in vivid memory was etched the scene of the moment before when he had peered forth to find his retreat alive with jostling animals so close that he had marked the white vapor of their breath and the texture of their coarse, bushy hair. Cold and storm had taken their places in a preconceived plan; but wolves he had not counted upon. He strapped on the weapon beneath his parka, and knelt to don snowshoes whose every ice-stiffened mesh crackled beneath his weight.

From the top of the drift he paused momentarily to look back and down into his late shelter. The sleeping bag lay in a huddled heap at the base of the wall. The condiment case perched precariously on its tiny shelf against a background that gleamed dully through the shadow. These were his last weapons against the cold; and he was leaving them behind. He turned away abruptly, heading north, leaning forward because of the steepness of the going and the wind.

For three hours he pushed through an unreal world whose details gradually dimmed before his consciousness.

At first he had been acutely aware of the soaring dimensions hemming in the gorges that opened before him, where massive ramparts glittered against the gray sky. He had marked strange muffled sounds from the unplumbed depths of snow beneath his feet, as of a giant fabric tearing, colossal timbers splintering.

Once a snowslide had obliterated his trail to the rear. It was as though a whole section of the world had torn itself from its moorings and plunged down into an abyss to the accompaniment of vast thunders that shook the very air. The optical illusion produced by this tremendous spectacle, similar

to that of one who stands too long on the brink of the cataract, brought with it a feeling of vertigo. Long after the lesser slides in the wake of the avalanche had passed, and the thunderous echoes had died away to a remote rumbling, it was as though the world about him was roaring skyward, while the avalanche itself was fixed.

Gradually, too, during that three-hour interval, while he fought against a species of growing lethargy that might have been exhaustion, he paid less and less heed to the wolves. He grew accustomed to their presence as they flounderingly paralleled his course to the right and left, and bellied along the trail he had broken to the rear. They became only a part of the landscape that moved. He felt that they were waiting, buzzardlike, for him to fall. That they might attack him while he still moved did not even occur to him. He had a weapon, and in his sole previous contact with the species they had melted away before its menace.

On the slope of a huge drift that damned the mighty gorge ahead, he knew that he was within a dozen paces of the end of his trail. Because his muscles responded but feebly to his will and on the face of the drift the going was hard, an insistent question that had dogged him during the previous hour now became unanswerable. Why go farther? Beyond the crest of the drift, nothing was visible but the advance guard of the coming storm.

And yet, because of an ancient instinct that urges man to meet his death on high ground, he set his teeth and achieved the crest.

From this point, a segment of a tiny valley ahead was visible through the driving snow. He noted this vaguely, and without interest. For hundreds of miles, other valleys and gorges extended northward. These things were of no importance now, nor the miles of the back trail, nor the world.

Turning at right angles to the lash of the storm, he lowered himself slowly to a lesser drift that the vagary of the wind had created on the crest. Seated thus, as on a comfortable couch, he folded his mittened hands and relaxed with a sigh of physical ease.

This was a moment which, contemplated in advance, he had thought would be climactic. Yet it seemed ordinary enough.

He had been tired. He was resting now. Already, having ceased to move, a comfortable, sluggish lethargy was creeping over him. He knew this to be the cold. Death was coming with the storm, in a matter of minutes. Within him, the fires of life were sinking like the flame of a candle burning low.

Long before, in the contemplation of this moment, he had had a feeling akin to desperation. Yet now he felt no fear. Death, like life, seemed remote. He was only comfortable, and relaxed.

There was but one jarring thought, and that was of the wolves. He could see them, massing like gray shadows in the lee of the drift. Growing more bold, they remained in the open. They eyed him fixedly, baffled no doubt, because he was motionless and yet remained upright.

Because of the driving wind and snow, most of the pack remained on the slope of the drift. A few achieved the crest, looming vague and wraithlike through the swirling mist. At first, these bold ones faced toward him, crouching; but presently he became aware that their interest was divided. Standing erect, their muzzles pointed into the chill current, the wind rippling in their rampant hackles, they turned their slanting eyes toward him, and away again. Three of their number moved down from the drift and were lost in the chaos that obscured the north.

It was the actions of these three that

caused the man to turn his head in the direction whence they had disappeared.

At first he could see nothing of the valley beyond the drift. Then between curtains of driving snow, as down a long vista, he caught a picture that impressed itself even upon his sluggish consciousness.

There had been a semicircle of wolves seated in the snow, all facing toward one point. This point near the base of the cliff, had appeared to be merely a white mound, but low on this mound was a dark blotch that might have been a shadowed opening in its irregular surface. This much he glimpsed ere the storm curtains joined.

The picture troubled him. In vain he tried to turn his mind to other matters, as a weary toiler sinking into slumber strives to still an insistent voice that speaks of more work to be done.

Those wolves in that sinister semicircle were waiting. For what? Perhaps something living was crouching in that cavelike opening beneath the mound.

He argued with the insistent voice, striving to evade the effort of throwing off the delicious lassitude that enveloped him. He was alone beyond Jump-off, he told himself. For two months past the terrific trail across the backbone of the continent had been closed. There might be some living thing crouching beneath the mound; it could not be another human being. It might have been an hallucination in its entirety, this vision of a semicircle of wolves grouped in the snow.

For long moments he argued thus, knowing full well that in the end he must rise up and investigate. Two thoughts drove him to it. The first was of the wolves that had unquestionably slipped down into the valley from the ridge. Only another and more promising quarry could have lured them away; a creature of flesh and blood. It was no hallucination then, that picture in the valley. The second thought was not fact, but surmise. It might be an animal down there at bay. It might be a man. Having cut himself off from the world and men, he told himself, he owed nothing further to humanity. Yet that being down below, crouching in his cave, perhaps at that moment was facing the wolves without a weapon, torn with agonies of fear and desperation. He himself had a weapon. Knowing he was armed with it, the wolves had kept at a respectful distance. But those below were waiting in a semicircle, in full view, with a deliberation that breathed of confidence.

Because he himself had known fear, the man arose, setting his teeth with the effort as his muscles shrieked protest, and faced down into the storm.

He could see barely beyond arm's length, but the contour of the slope guided him. Almost underfoot, the sinister circle broke before him. They floundered near at hand, closed their ranks in the rear, but he paid them no heed. Before him loomed the mound, and the low, shadowed cave.

He squatted on his haunches to peer in, his hand on his weapon.

At first he could see nothing through the gloom. Then details slowly became clear. A vague figure took form and substance, a human figure seated Buddhalike in the narrow confines of his retreat, muffled in a furred parka, and swathed from the waist down in Hudson Bay robes. The seated one's broad shoulders were hunched forward, arms folded, and across the crook of the left forearm the round muzzle of a revolver peered forth unwaveringly as though fixed in concrete.

Because his own thought processes were sluggish, the realization that thus casually he had encountered another of his own kind, brought with it no sense of astonishment. He was curious only as to whether the seated figure was still

alive. He could see nothing of the other's features. Like the weapon, the hood of his parka was turned toward the opening of the cave. His immobility suggested death. Yet the wolves in that sinister circle had been waiting, not attacking.

Motionless, he crouched to peer in. Imagelike, the other stared back. Thus they remained for a long moment; then from the parka a harsh, grimly sardonic voice spoke. The sound of it was staggering, a stupendous miracle. It was a human voice, speaking thus casually in an unreal world, something known and familiar from a past life infinitely remote.

"Well, I'm hanged!" quoth the seated one.

## CHAPTER III.

### WHILE WOLVES WAITED.

THE stranger continued to squat on his haunches and peer into the cave, striving to appraise this miracle, unable as yet to grasp its significance. In spirit as in body, during the preceding hours surrounded by savage forces beyond experience or imagination, he had felt himself to be withdrawing from life. He was as utterly alone, so he believed, as though he had been wandering across the icy wastes of some mountain of the moon.

He was far beyond Jump-off—and life—too far to retrace his steps. Yet here was a fellow man, and the sound of his voice, harsh and matter of fact, jerked him back instantly to the real and tangible.

The seated one's shadowed parka peered back at him. Then from the swaddling bulk emanated a hoarse chuckle.

"Come in," he invited. "Come right in, stranger, and we'll visit a spell. Nice day, ain't it? Listen, brother!" his voice became more commanding, "best make it snappy. You got your back to them devils and they ain't so polite as they was a couple of hours ago."

Over his shoulder, the stranger saw that the wolves were indeed jostling, close-ranked, behind him. He lowered his head hurriedly and crawled in.

Turning himself about in the cramped quarters, achieving a sitting position beside the other, he saw that the cave was merely the lee of an overturned sled. A strip of tarpaulin was stretched from gee-pole to runner, and over all the snow had drifted.

He could tell little of his companion because of his enveloping furred parka. Yet he sensed that he was a bulky person, broad of shoulder and deep of chest. There was a strange immobility about him, a kind of rigidity in his posture as of one held in a vise. Even now, with the newcomer beside him, he did not turn his head when he spoke, but kept the hood of his parka turned toward the door. This may have been on account of the wolves, but the stranger felt with a pang of pity, and an accompanying vague resentment because of that pity, that the other was farther gone than he. Even the effort of speaking was accomplished by a seeming effort of will. By what downright force of character he was able to speak jocosely, the stranger was unable to fathom.

"Now that we're comfortably settled," said the bulky one, "an' liable to be for quite some spell, we can have a reg'lar session. I ain't a curious critter, you understand, but this ain't the time for polite parleying. Who in blazes are you? Where'd you hail from, brother? When I seen your legs outside just now, I sure thought my eyes were doing me dirt. I couldn't figure what other blasted fool besides me had been caught in weather like this." He chuckled again. "And whilst we're gossiping frank and earnest like this, we'd best keep our eyes peeled. Them mangy devils yonder ain't holding off much

longer. You carrying artillery and still able to use it? How're you fixed for ammunition?"

The stranger shifted uneasily under this bombardment of questions. When he did not immediately reply, the other grunted, struck by a sudden thought.

"Listen," he demanded, "are you white or Indian? *Halo kum-tux?*"

"I understand you, if that's what you mean," said the stranger slowly. "I'll answer your last question first. I have a revolver, but I have only four shells left."

"Then we're out on a limb, brother, I've got two. It'll make our bluff good for a while. After that will come the show-down."

"As for your other inquiries," continued the stranger, "I hesitated before replying because I was wondering what object could be served by discussing our —er—personal affairs. The reasons why we are here are immaterial. Also, to put it somewhat bluntly, I resented your presence here. It has disarranged my plans."

"Sorry," murmured the bulky one, obviously striving to mimic the other's precise manner and inflection. "I should have fallen off the cliff somewhere else. Excuse it, please."

"That isn't what I mean, of course," protested the stranger. "I was not referring to you personally. But I have traveled something better than four thousand miles to reach this point, believing it to be absolutely remote from traveled trails. It is disconcerting upon reaching here, to find it so—er—crowded. For you, individually, I have nothing but the deepest sympathy. It's evident that you're in a serious plight."

"Sweet Maria," breathed the bulky one, resuming his natural voice. "I don't get you, brother. You ain't kidding yourself, are you? Don't you waste them feelings of deepest sympathy on me. As near as I can see it, you're in the same jack pot. It don't take no brains to figure that out, in spite of your being so shy about your said personal affairs. You ain't got a dog team. You're afoot. You ain't got a pack. You was wabbling on your legs as you stood outside. What's the answer? Before very long and the both of us is sitting inside the pearly gates and reachin' for a harp."

"How long?" questioned the stranger.

"Before you popped up," said the bulky one, "I figured my chances at maybe two hours. My left leg is busted. But it's also froze, so it don't hurt none. My right foot is solid and my left hand. So I was losing out pretty rapid on heat, not being able to move around. Now that you're here, the two of us is raising the temperature in this hole a couple of degrees. Say three hours before the showdown."

"Continue," urged the stranger. "This is interesting. And how do you appraise my chance of surviving?"

"Interesting is right," the other grunted, with grudging admiration. "Three hours for you, too. We'll hit the long trail together. How do I figure it? The nearest place you could have come from at this time of the year is Jump-off. Mushing on foot all the way, huh?"

"Correct."

"There ain't many fellers could have done it, breaking trail through the blizzard. So you're plumb wore out. Your feet is slowly freezing whilst we're talking. An hour more and you'll be like me, too lazy to move. After that, curtains, provided we can hold off them wolves and they leave us cash in like white men. How does that appeal to you?"

"Fair enough," said the stranger. "But there's one phase of the program that troubles me, I must confess. Do you mean that there is a probability that those wolves yonder will attack us before we—er—succumb to the cold?"

"I can see," said the bulky one, "that you ain't backward about discussin' unpleasant details. They might rush us. When them critters is just plain ordinary hungry, you can generally tell what they'll do next. But when their ribs is rasping together, it's a toss-up. If they get to talking it over amongst themselves, and get sold on the theory that there ain't enough food in the both of us to make it interestin' and it's every wolf for himself, then they'll just naturally forget all them cautious ideas and roll down on us like a busted dam. Otherwise they'll sit tight—and take their victuals presently out of cold storage."

"To sum it all up, then," said the stranger, "this is the situation: We're doomed in any event. We can't escape the cold. We can't escape the wolves. The only problematical phase is whether the wolves—er—fancy will lead them to devour us alive or dead?"

"You've done grasped it." There was more than a tingle of respect in the bulky one's voice. "I've got to hand it to you, brother, at that. Now me, I've picked up my polish in the North, all the way from Labrador to Nome. A jack pot like this is part of the game, and I ain't hollerin'. But how a chechahco like you can be so calm and placidlike when he's comin' in on the home stretch is something that's got me guessing.

"Don't get me wrong," he added with a species of jovial sarcasm, "I ain't proddin' into them personal affairs you mentioned a while back. A couple of hours more and it won't make no difference either way. We're like them two Englishmen who was shipwrecked on a desert island. Ever hear the yarn? As soon as their raft touched shore, they stepped out and each walked away in a different direction on account of not being introduced."

For a space the stranger sat in silence, his parka turned toward the low entrance of their retreat. Beyond, the ranks of ghostlike animals, circling and snarling among themselves, were only half concealed by the driving snow, like shadowy figures on a silver screen.

"On second thought," he said at length, "in view of the—er—singular circumstances in which we find ourselves, it should be extremely interesting to compare notes. It is a situation that has—er—intriguing aspects—two strangers meeting in this manner, drawn from remote corners of the earth to face death together. Two individuals, let us say, each of whom are of differing types and from—er—widely separated walks of life. Students of psychology would find much in this tableau that would add to our knowledge of human behavior and motivation. It is unfortunate that we must carry these data with us to the grave. Yet for our own amusement while we are—er—cashing in, it would be interesting, eh?"

"Not for me," chuckled the bulky one, "if you continuously clutter up your conversation with them double-geared words. I'm one of these untaught savages that ain't heavy on mental gymnastics. On the other hand, it ought to furnish a little amusement. Lead on, brother. It's your deal."

"You first," demurred the stranger, courteously.

The bulky one threw back his head and roared, his laughter ending in a spasm of coughing. At the sound of it, a turmoil arose in the snarling pack outside.

"Excuse it, please," the big man gasped hoarsely. "I hadn't ought to laugh like that. It stirs up them varmints and lets more cold into my lungs. But you're a card, brother. It tickles me, you bein' as polite as a boiled owl when the both of us can dang near see the sunshine glinting on the pearly gates, and hear them angels sing. Yeah, I hand it to you.

"The question is, how come we got

into this jack pot, huh? First off, notwithstandin' that I'm pretty well known in the Mackenzie River country and in the Yukon, you prob'ly ain't ever heard of me. You're holdin' converse with——"

"Pardon," interrupted the stranger. "Names mean nothing. I won't ask you to reveal your identity, and I will refrain from revealing mine."

"Still a little shy and bashful, huh? Whereas it won't make no difference to us or them wolves, it's O. K. with me. But we got to give each other a handle to go by. The boys call me 'Boomer.'"

"When I came by the village of Jump-off," said the stranger, "it chanced that contrary to my plans I was observed by a somewhat—er—primitive person who, in our brief conversation, dubbed me 'Professor.' That appellation, which was singularly apt in view of my calling, will serve our purposes."

"What did he look like, this primitive feller?"

"Not a tall man, but I gathered the impression that he was quite robust. Tawny eyebrows, a big mouth, blue eyes, and a large disfiguring scar extending from cheek bone to the point of his jaw. I gained a good view of him in the light from the window."

"That would be Shorty Hoff." There was a vague note of yearning in the big man's voice. "He's wintering at Jump-off. How that buzzard can play his hand at poker! And lap up squareface! But there's no use ponderin' over them cutthroats roastin' around a fire. Like most of them pleasin' prospects, it's a long ways off."

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE WAY OF THE PACK.

WELL, Professor," said Boomer, "my said personal affairs can be stated brief and earnest. It's on account of my blasted foolishness that I'm setting here right now. I craved to be the first musher to make it over the Pass from the Mackenzie in midwinter. Old-timers claimed it couldn't be done. I figgered it could. I placed my bets on it, and lost. I made it over the Pass all right, but nobody'll ever know it, on account of me not reaching Jump-off. And that's that."

"But, my dear chap," protested the professor, after a lengthy pause indicated that the bulky one considered the narrative concluded, "to give color to this exchange of confidences, you should be more explicit. Your statement is entirely too brief. You and I, we have agreed, are facing certain death. Surely this fact is of sufficient importance to permit you to give more than such a casual explanation."

"That's all there is to it," Boomer insisted. "Them mangy wolves stampeded my dogs over the cliff. Tryin' to hold 'em in line, I went over too. When I clawed my way out, the dogs had busted loose, and was battling for their lives over beyond the ridge. I crawled over to help them, but on account of my leg which was busted, and the snow, I got there too late. Being all snarled up in their harness, the wolves had done made hash out of them. I figgered I must be within fifteen miles of Jump-off, and thought maybe I could crawl that far." He chuckled. "About two miles of that, and I was ready to admit that the deal was done. So I figured I'd best come back and make my stand by my sled. It wasn't two miles back—it was a thousand—them wolves watchin' me squirming in the snow. And here I am. How does that suit you, Professor?"

The other shook his head. "It's fair enough as far as it goes. Highly dramatic, in so far as it depicts your struggle to maintain life. But, my dear Boomer, in the interest of—er—mental gymnastics, the background is sadly lacking. Here we are, two dif-

ferent types; the one, let us say, intellectual; the other—er—primitive. What chain of circumstances, what psychological forces, brought us here?"

"You keep pestering me with ideas I don't know nothin' about," grumbled the bulky one. "I just got through tellin' you how come I'm in this jack pot. There ain't nothing mysterious about it. I've trailed some fast dog teams in my time. I got a reputation for being hard an' reckless and what not. So when an old grubstaker named Geroux made the bet, five to one, that there wasn't anybody could make it over the Pass between November and March, inclusive, and backed his play with five thousand bucks, I didn't lose no time in calling him. But I've lost, and Geroux can still take rank as a wise old fox."

"Geroux," murmured the other. "Boomer, the plot thickens.

"You know Geroux?"

"No. My sole knowledge of the gentleman is contained in a short newspaper squib that I read in a Cleveland paper, telling of the wager. That brief item in the newspaper has a bearing on my presence here. But that is part of my story. We are concerned now with yours, which I suspect is tremendously interesting."

"Wait," interrupted Boomer. "Leave me ask a pointed question first. It's been burnin' me up ever since you first walked in here offhand and casual like you was droppin' in to a pink tea. Either you're one of the coolest articles I've ever met up with; or you're so plumb wrapped up in yore said mental gymnastics that you ain't got yore feet on the ground. Ain't it dawned on you that you've got but two hours to live—maybe three at the outside? Don't you know that them are real wolves yonder, and whilst we're talking, it's cold, so blasted cold that we're freezin' whilst we're settin'? How come, then," he spoke almost gruffly, "you got the crust to discuss psychology and kindred subjects, instead of squirmin' and twistin' and fightin' to save yore hide?"

"Ah, Boomer," said the professor, shaking his head, "I can understand and appreciate your point of view, but you can't comprehend mine. It is the difference between the intellectual and the primitive type. Having accepted the fact that death is inevitable, I can contemplate the event calmly. But you, being active and energetic, accustomed to battle successfully against your environment, will never admit that death is upon you—death from which there is no escape. Even now, having set your own time limit of—er—less than three hours, you still have hopes, eh?"

"It's a natural proposition," said the bulky one. "I know I'm sunk. But way down inside there's a part of us that dies hard. When I first seen your legs outside, I couldn't help but figger maybe there was a chance. But your agreein' that there wasn't made it final. That's the thing that's got me buffaloed. There's something funny about you, Professor. It looks like you *wanted* to die."

"Boomer," said the professor, softly, "because of your point of view, you will be surprised, no doubt. But that is precisely why I am here."

The other's great bulk was motionless for a space, his hooded parka turned fixedly toward his companion.

"I don't get you," he muttered. "That was a fast one. You ain't telling me you come up into this forsaken wilderness because you craved and expected to cash in?"

"Correct," said the professor. "And you understand, of course, my dear Boomer, that I make this—er—admission only on the certainty that we two, being about to die, will carry our mutual confidences with us to the grave."

"But why in blue-hinged Halifax," questioned the downright one, with emphasis, "did your disordered fancy bring you up here, way up beyond

Jump-off? Now me, if I got into the shape where I craved a new deal, I'd surely pass out peaceful where they was sunshine and flowers and birds singing. Yeah, and where I could be buried proper where the ground ain't muck and ice and them wolves wouldn't be growlin' and snarlin' over my bones."

"The wolves, I must admit, are a factor that did not enter into my plans," said the professor. "However, I am not superstitious concerning the disposition of my bones. It is a species of pride that brought me here where I could—er—pass out. Just as it was a species of pride in your physical capabilities that brought you here. In that respect we are opposites. You thought you could defy death in the—er—Pass and live to boast of it. I took my leave of life before I started north. We are dying together. An unusual coincidence, eh, Boomer?"

"Proceed," growled Boomer. "This here is one peculiar layout on which I crave a show-down. I'm taking back what I said a while back about not being a curious critter. I've been around a little in my time. I thought I'd met all kinds of gents, and had 'em all set up in their proper places like pins in a bowlin' alley. But it sure looks to me like you're standin' alone, on the outside of the crowd."

"An excellent figure of speech," the professor approved. "For years I have felt, in spirit, that I stood outside the crowd. But before we touch upon my story, let me ask a question concerning yours. How does it happen that your life has been spent in the North? What forces kept you in this—er—hostile environment?"

"There ain't anything mysterious about that. As a kid, I got the reputation of being hardboiled and reckless. I was kind of proud of it, and when my old dad figgered out a white-collar profession for me, I run away from school, and drifted out West into the Michigan woods where I got to be a roughneck, roarin' lumberjack. I was up in the Athabasca country trappin' when news of the Klondike busted on the world, and I was among that first crew that mushed in to Dawson from the other side—the Mackenzie. After the Klondike and Nome, I prospected down in the Iditarod country and then went back to trappin'. Covered most of the territory from the Great Bear to Hudson Bay.

"An' that's all there is to it," the big man spoke almost impatiently. "There isn't any more. You can't build no dramatics around me, Professor. I stayed in the North because it's a fightin' game. There's lots of room. Crowds ain't trompin' on your toes. When you do meet up with another gent along the Athabasca, or the Great Bear, or Bonanza, he's another savage like yourself. The lily-fingered and white-livered scissorbills don't last. They pull out or pass out. That's why——" He hesitated.

"Continue," the professor urged, without resentment. "Don't spare my feelings, my dear Boomer. You were about to say, that's why you are surprised to find me here, eh?"

"Not exactly," said the bulky one. "But you've got me puzzled. Speakin' blunt, you talk like a scissorbill. But only a savage could have come this far from Jump-off, afoot and through the blizzard."

"Thanks," said the professor. "That was half complimentary, at least. Boomer, your story confirms my first impressions. I, too, will speak bluntly. We are opposite types. You are a savage. I am a—er—scissorbill. You are a brave, hardy man. I am a weakling, a coward. Our separate environments have fixed our status irrevocably, like—er—pins in a bowling alley. I have planned to die alone. At first, I resented your presence here. Now it appeals to me as an eminently satisfac-

tory—er—arrangement that we are dying together."

"Why?"

"Because, my dear Boomer, long ago, in my boyhood, it was a lad of your type who started me along the—er—bitter path that has led to this precise spot."

"Let's have it," said Boomer. "Why are you here?"

"I'll tell you," said the professor, "and you should feel flattered in that you are the only person, living or dead, who has ever heard my story. You will understand why."

"Proceed with confidence." The bulky one chuckled. "That's always been my slogan. Yeah, the said details of your past is sure safe with me, professor."

"Under the circumstances, yes. Well then, my dear Boomer, I will begin first with a seemingly insignificant event that actually changed the whole course of my life. When I was a lad of fourteen, back in Maine——"

"It's a great State." The bulky one's jovial manner had returned.

"There was, in the academy I attended, an obnoxious youth of my own age toward whom I formed a great antipathy. He was a sturdy lad, freckled of feature, and with flaming red hair. His name was McBain. I mention his name here only because, during the intervening years, it has become a symbol of the forces that have widened the gulf separating me from those who walk and talk as free men. Even now, with the knowledge that life for me is definitely in the past, and with all my training in self-restraint, I cannot utter it aloud with composure.

"McBain," he repeated, his incisive voice charged with suppressed bitterness. "It's very connotation is sneering. The sound of it has echoed in the background of my mind in every crisis that has confronted me since that sweltering day, back of the gymnasium at Grover's Academy, when this freckle-faced lad pummeled me into submission—and called me coward.

"But I did not mean to speak with such heat. Odd that after all these years that scene should be so vivid. But it was the turning point in my life——"

"Hold everything, Professor," the bulky one's voice cut ruthlessly into the narrative. "Unlimber your artillery. Them devils is about to rush us."

The snarling outside their retreat had increased in volume. Close ranked, the wolves were massed at the low entrance. They were on their bellies, ears flattened, snow-flecked hackles erect, fangs champing in a peculiarly hideous and indescribable sound as they bolstered up their famine-mad courage to the attack. Inching forward in a tense, crouching attitude, they were so close that the foul stench of them filled the retreat, and the strange opalescent glow of their eyes was plainly discernible.

Beyond this front rank many others loomed in the swirling snow. These stood more erect, their powerful necks and broad shoulders visible, their fangs bared as they added to the swelling blood cry of the pack. The limited area visible through the low opening was a living mass of wolves.

With fingers clumsy beyond his previous experience, the professor fumbled with his weapon and presented it through the folds of his parka.

"I got two shells, you got four," Boomer shouted in his ear. "Shoot first, I'll follow. If it doesn't stop 'em, give 'em a couple more."

"Correct," said the professor.

With a finger stiffened with cold, he pulled the trigger. Simultaneously, Boomer's gun roared. The result was chaos.

Boomer's animal dropped in its tracks. The wolf upon whose broad chest the professor had fired point-blank sank to its haunches, threw up a scarred head,

and from gaping jaws emitted a demoniacal howl whose sheer frenzy of rage and pain was appalling. The echoes of that anguished cry rose above the din. Even as it sank to the snow, the stricken animal turned in a lightning movement to face his fellows; but too late. With singleness of purpose, and acting in instant unison, the entire pack flung in a living wave upon the fallen animals.

The professor glanced questioningly at Boomer, who shook his head. Both, motionless, watched the grim drama being enacted outside.

It was an unreal scene in the snow and gloom. The savage turmoil had increased in volume. The fallen wolves were blotted from view. Almost within arm's length of the door, and in utter disregard of their late human quarry, the pack formed a writhing pyramid of struggling bodies. Others, less fortunate, ranged around this pyramid, leaped upon it, striving to bore in; and from the heart of the snarling mass came other sounds, muffled and bestial, growlings that were throaty as though bursting through fangs buried in flesh, rending and tearing sounds, and the cracking of bones.

By degrees the chaos abated. The pyramid disintegrated, as individual animals rolled down and away, hackles erect, snapping to right and left. Only a few of the larger and stronger ones remained, turning about in their tracks, snuffling and burying their muzzles in the crimson-stained snow; and the two fallen wolves were gone.

Boomer chuckled. The professor, huddled in his parka, seemed to have shrunken a little in stature.

"My word!" he breathed. "What was the meaning of all that? I thought we had—er—dispatched two of the ugly brutes."

"We did," said Boomer. "And their gentle playmates polished 'em off like hot cakes."

"You mean—that the unspeakable creatures devour their own kind?"

"When their ribs is rasping together, it's every wolf for himself," said Boomer. "They don't ask no questions. It was an eye-opener, eh, partner? With a free-for-all like that in prospect, you ain't surprised that I saved out a shell for myself, what?"

The professor shivered.

"Continue," urged the bulky one, chuckling. "This little diversion will take their minds off us for a minute or two. Let's see, where were you at? You was telling about a battle with a red-headed kid back at Grover's Academy in Maine."

"I don't remember mentioning the name of the academy," demurred the professor.

"Hoover," the bulky one insisted, "or Glover. Something like that. It don't make no difference. The battle's what interests me. Let's hear it. But don't add too many unnecessary details, Professor. Talk fast. Our little pests out yonder have had a bite or two of warm meat. After discussin' it among themselves for a spell, they'll be lookin' us over again, lickin' their chops, and wonderin' why they've waited so long. Yeah, and whilst you're talkin', brother, cover up your gun hand, or them three shells you got left won't do us any good in the show-down."

## CHAPTER V.

### THE SAVAGE AND THE SCISSORBILL.

I'LL talk fast," agreed the professor, "but first I will admit, my dear Boomer, that this incident just past, which clearly showed the ferocity of those creatures, was an—er—eye-opener. I had thought of them as being somewhat in the background—off stage, as it were. Now I can see that they are very close to the principals in the drama. Er—too close."

"Just acrost the footlights," Boomer

chuckled. "Yeah, and before long they'll hog the whole show."

"The fight between myself and this red-headed youth," continued the professor, "can be dealt with in a few words. We were the same age. I was taller than he, but more slender. He was of sturdy, stocky physique. The reason for the encounter is immaterial, some boyish difference of opinion. He challenged me to fight. I accepted. There was no alternative, for the pride of youth is that of kings.

"We fought. I was bested. Being high-strung and sensitive my nature, my spirit was bruised far more than my body. Finally I shielded my battered face with my arms and admitted defeat. But the red-headed youth, inflamed by his rage and triumph, tormented me, taunted me, tried vainly to goad me to further effort. The spectators, like all boys of that age—and men and nations—being savages at heart, sided with my conqueror. He called me coward; but my spirit being vanquished, like my body, I said nothing.

"He called me coward." The professor's unemotional tones were those of one who sits in judgment upon himself. "The pack took up the cry. But I merely pressed my arms the tighter over my eyes, which were burning with hot tears, and made no reply."

He fell silent for a space. The bulky one waited, saying nothing.

"Boomer," said the professor, at length. "That was—er—a tough break."

"Hard lines," agreed Boomer. "That red-headed kid hadn't ought to have rubbed it in, after you was licked. But proceed, Professor, I may be dumb, but I can't see anything out of the way about it. Kids fight. They always have. They always will. The fact that he claimed you was yellow after you had done yore best, was a discredit to him, not you. You should have forgotten about it. Or maybe after takin' on a little more weight and heft, you could have gone looking for him and politely knocked him for a row of gin poles."

"Ah, but Boomer," said the professor. "That was the precise point. I hadn't done my best. I knew it at the time, deep in my heart. He was a dominant, overbearing youth, and he cowed me. Afterwards, too late, I would willingly have sacrificed my right arm for the chance of re-living that—er—encounter. Had we fought again, very soon, before the whole inner fabric of my—er—self-respect began to disintegrate, it would perhaps have changed the whole course of my life.

"But he did not challenge me again. He disregarded me, and his boyish contempt of manner was adopted by his followers. More than once I confronted him, calling upon all my will power to utter the words that would precipitate another battle. But the words would not come, due to a conflict of impulses within me; and I would hang my head and slink away. I yearned for a chance to vindicate myself in my own eyes and the eyes of my limited world. At the same time, I knew that, doing my best, I would certainly be humbled, and this was torturing. Also as the days passed, a doubt arose, deep within me, as to whether or not I was capable of doing my best.

"The rest of my story hinges upon this incident. It is the foundation stone upon which the whole structure rests. Life at the academy speedily became unendurable. I persuaded my parents to remove me to another, hoping that I could begin again to reëstablish my self-respect, hoping to forget. But the thing preyed on my mind. My imagination fed upon it. Before I left college, I knew that I was a coward at heart.

"How did I know this? I avoided conflict of any sort. At first, this was not because I shrank from conflict, but because I was afraid of fear.

"Do you understand me, Boomer? I

did not play football, for example, although I was tall and rangy and with the muscular coördination of an athlete. I wanted to play football, but I was afraid—afraid that in a crucial moment I would fail to do my best, afraid that when the opposition's interference came tearing through the line, I, as a backfield man in the secondary line of defense might cower with arms shielding my face instead of hitting them hard and low.

"I did not try for crew, or other major sports, except track. Here, I thought with shameful satisfaction, was a field of endeavor in which my despicable inner self could not be revealed. But in the mile run, in the most important race of my college career, I was beaten by a yard. Spectators said it was a great race; the time was close to a world's intercollegiate record; but deep down in the inner heart of me, where all of us must meet ourselves face to face, I suspected that in that last grueling home stretch, I had, in spirit, shielded my eyes from the sight of the agonized runner beside me, and closed my ears to the sound of his pounding feet.

"The war was the last chapter. I was a professor of psychology in a midwestern university. There was a ground school established near by, and I told myself that I would be an aviator. This was my opportunity to vindicate myself in the most reckless and dangerous field of activity in the great imbroglio. But I was offered a post at Washington, in the Intelligence Corps. It was argued that the nation needed my talents and training as a vocational psychologist. I yielded, was commissioned, wore shining boots and spurs, made after-dinner speeches, paraded at social functions, lived in ease and comfort; and no man, seeing me strut in the solemn dignity of the hour, could even remotely guess the depths of shame in which I writhed as I read each bulletin from the front. I ranked high in a recognized branch of the service; but I knew that, at heart, I was lower than the mud beneath the trench shoes of the shivering, hungry, but fighting lads at Saint Mihiel, Montfaucon, and Bois Argonne.

"And that's all there is to it, my dear Boomer. My parents were dead. I had no near relatives. My affairs were in order. On a certain day, not long ago, as I sat in the quiet of my study, there came to me a thought before which I cowered, with arms shielding my eyes. But presently I faced it squarely. I was a despicable thing masquerading as a man. Why go further? It was time to die.

"Time to die," he repeated, his precise voice again assuming its unemotional qualities. "I can view that decision with calmness now, Boomer. At the moment it was—er—tremendous, for our animal instincts cling to life. Having reached this decision, it was a proposition merely of ways and means. Here again, a species of pride was a factor. My family is an old and honored one. I was false to its ancient traditions, but why parade this fact before the world? It would have been easy to have—er—taken my departure. But I was a man of some prominence, and the thing I was about to do would become known—unless I arranged my leave-taking with care.

"It chanced that while I pondered this phase of the situation, I read a newspaper item with whose contents, you, my dear Boomer, are already familiar. It referred to the open wager made by this Geroux to the effect that no man, single-handed, could traverse the Pass from Stormfield Landing, on the Mackenzie side, to Jump-off, or vice versa, between November and March inclusive.

"This item meant little to me, at first, except that the name of the village, Jump-off, intrigued me. I looked it up in the atlas and discovered that it was

far up in the remote North. My mind dwelt upon it, and out of a long chain of reflection, I evolved a plan that was simple and—er—effective.

"It was carried out as follows: I took leave of my—er—acquaintances, announcing a brief trip West. At the same time, I left sealed advices with a trust officer at my bank to be opened on a certain date. This sealed document will reveal, when opened, that Geroux' wager had interested me in the region north of Jump-off, and that I had departed thither via Seattle, Prince Rupert, and Fort Connolly for a brief exploration in the interests of scientific research.

"Thus I am here. I dismissed my guide below Jump-off and proceeded on foot. In time, the news of my untimely death will reach the outside world. Due to the presence of these wolves, the specific manner of my—er—departure will perhaps not be known. But that, as I said before, is of secondary importance.

"Boomer, that is my story." The professor spoke as one who has burned his bridges behind him. "Under other circumstances, wild horses could not have dragged it from me. But you and I have a partnership in death. What I have said here departs with us. You have listened with patience, and I thank you for it. You will not understand me, perhaps, being of the primitive type and not given to—er—mental gymnastics, but I feel better for this—er—confessional."

The big man made no reply. During the narrative he had sat immobile, saying nothing, the hood of his parka turned at an angle that included both the door of the retreat and his companion. Beyond the door, the wolves circled in a growing restlessness.

"Dramatic, eh, Boomer?" the professor reflected aloud. "There is food for thought in our chance encounter here. We are opposites in all ways save one. Geroux' wager brought you south and west from the Mackenzie to this point. I was traveling east and north. Love of glory and pride of brawn lured you. I was driven by despair. You are a brave man; I am a coward. We have only one thing in common: we die together.

"Tell me, Boomer"—he leaned forward, drawing his parka closer about him—"you despise me, eh? Speak frankly. Do not spare my feelings. It will add to the—er—purging of my soul. All my life, since boyhood, I have feared the reaction of the world when my secret was known. What is that reaction? Speak up, Boomer, I beg of you. Time—er—presses."

The bulky one had turned his head slowly until he now faced the other. His shadowed parka concealed his face; yet the professor sensed that his gaze was fixed upon him unwinkingly. What emotions of scorn, condemnation, or pity were mirrored in those hidden eyes, he could not tell; and in the big man's harsh voice, when he spoke, he could read nothing, at first, save a reflection of his own analytical mood.

"You're an educated scissorbill, Professor," he said. "I'm only an untaught savage. When you figger out things, you can find the proper words to express 'em. Now me, I can figger, too; but generally I get all tangled up in what I aim to say. You're one of these psy-chologists. That means you're continuously interestin' yourself in what a man thinks about, and what made him think it, huh?"

"In a way, yes. Psychology, as I have often told my students, is the study of behavior."

"Yeah. Then I'm an amateur of the same breed. What a feller thinks about don't worry me none. An' only half of what he says. But what a feller does has always been plumb interestin' to me. You ask me what my conclusions are, if any. Well, sir, whilst you've

been talkin' I've been listening and figgering, and I've done reached a conclusion that will sure bust on you like a bomb, Professor."

"Let's have it, my dear Boomer." The professor's manner was neither tolerant nor patronizing; yet subtly it conveyed a blasé attitude toward the threatened intellectual explosion.

"First, leave me ask a few pointed questions. When you've done figgered out something, it's final, huh?"

"In theory," said the professor, "a scientist is open-minded. His conclusions are presumed to be based solely on existing data. In actual practice, however, most of us are prone to minimize data which tends to—er—disprove a personal opinion."

"Let's get down to cases." The bulky one's voice had hardened with a touch of authority. He was not belligerent nor overbearing; but the professor was suddenly conscious of the massive, physical force of the man—not as a subject for detached analysis, but as a living, breathing, dominant personality looming at his elbow. "What I aim to say is, you're a bullheaded gent. You claim you're yellow. It's the first time in my life I ever heard a feller say so so calm and placid, whilst he's still able to stand on his hind legs. Mostly, the polecat who's saffron-hued is the feller that argues the loudest to prove he ain't. But let that pass. You're thoroughly sold on the theory that you're yellow, huh? There ain't nothin' I can say to prove different?"

"Hardly." The professor shrugged his shoulders. "It isn't a debatable proposition, my dear Boomer. My very presence here is sufficient proof of the—er—fact."

"If I was to tell you, from my considerable experience," continued the bulky one, "that it takes a gent with iron in his system to decide to cash in, figger out that precise way of cashin' in, mush on foot this far north of Jump-off, and set here like you've done calmly talkin' it over whilst them mangy devils yonder who don't mean maybe are waitin' and gnashin' their teeth—all them details wouldn't make no difference, huh?"

"Those details are outside the question," said the professor. "Except that they offer additional evidence of the—er—fact, and the lengths to which a species of pride drove me to hide it from the world."

"And if I was to point out," Boomer persisted, "that yore battle with this no-account red-headed kid happened way back when you was half grown, and you ain't been battling since, it wouldn't mean nothin' to you, huh? What I'm drivin' at is, ain't there a possibility that if you'd given yoreself another chance, you might have turned out to be a regular savage?"

"In the formative period of the individual's development," said the professor, with the patient air of one who explains the obvious, "character grooves are created that are followed in his subsequent life. Had I not fought with the red-headed youth during my impressionable age, I might have developed the normal Anglo-Saxon trait of courage to which I was entitled by heredity. But, in that fight, he impressed me with the belief that I was—er—a coward. That belief, coming ruthlessly as it did, during the plastic age, later became fixed, and a fact.

"Let me suggest, my dear Boomer," he continued hastily but firmly, as his companion would have spoken, "that we consider this phase of the matter—my—er—cowardice—as axiomatic. After all, our time for—er—mental gymnastics is limited. Let us assume that it is a fact. Accept my assurance that it is beyond dispute, and proceed."

"You're right," grunted the bulky one. "Action is my long suit in an argument. When it comes to language, you're sitting tight on a royal flush an'

I'm makin' my bluff on a measly pair. Yeah, an' we've wasted too much time already. Professor, out of all this talk I've done figgered out something. It'll surprise you. It'll flabbergast you. Maybe you won't see what it's got to do with all you've said. It won't make no difference in the deal. Get set for a shock."

"All set, my dear Boomer." The professor's voice was calm.

"Behind us where we're settin"—the bulky one measured each word—"is a racin' sled of spruce and ash and rawhide. I built it for this particular trip. It's light, on account of my needin' every ounce for dog feed, mushin' over the Pass. Bein' strong as steel, it wasn't busted when me and the dogs took our nose dive over the cliff. Two minutes from now, Professor—or maybe three, dependin' on how long it takes you to assimilate the idea and agree thereto—you're goin' to rise up from where you set, whilst we still got three shells between us and you've got your strength. You're going to bust out this sled, set me on it, and take me down to Jump-off."

## CHAPTER VI.

### A TERRIFIC MOMENT.

HUDDLED as they were, elbow to elbow in their cramped quarters, there was little possibility that the words of either could have been misunderstood. Yet the hood of the professor's parka tilted a little, in an unconscious reflex, as if he doubted the evidence of his own ears. The big man said nothing further. He waited; and about the huddled massive bulk of him was an air of aggressive confidence.

"My dear Boomer," said the professor at length. "Are you sure you are in command of your—er—mental faculties?"

Boomer chuckled. "Jolted you, huh? I said I would. No pardner, I ain't nuts. And I ain't joking, neither. You're taking me down to Jump-off."

"But the idea is preposterous."

"Maybe so. But we'll sure give 'er a whirl."

The professor studied the other curiously, not yet convinced but that the big man's reason was crumbling.

"We were discussing an—er—intellectual topic, my dear Boomer. When I ask you for your reaction to a character analysis of myself, you come forth with this bizarre suggestion. The relation between what you have said, and what we were discussing is—er—obscure."

"Not to me it ain't! You're interested in the professor. I'm interested in Boomer. You've been tellin' me all about yourself, and how yellow you was. While you're talking, I'm thinking. You ask me what my reaction is." He grunted. "It ain't mental gymnastics, Professor. You claim you're yellow. Provin' it to yourself, you've done bucked the blizzard farther north from Jump-off than most savages could have done. What's the answer? I figger you're husky enough and hardboiled enough—and yellow enough—to buck the drifts, fight off the wolves, and drag me down to Jump-off, where hardboiled old Boomer, who ain't ready to die, will have a fightin' chance to live."

"But—but, my dear chap." The professor stammered his amazement at the realization that the other was speaking, not only in all seriousness, but with a grim determination. "Assuming, even that I *wanted* to make the attempt, and had the courage to do it, it would still be an impossible feat. I deliberately came so far north from Jump-off that I knew I could not retrace my steps. I couldn't do it—er—alone, not to mention dragging a large man like you upon a sled. When I first encountered you here, we agreed upon the—er—proposition that both of us faced certain death."

"I've changed my mind," said the

big man bluntly. "I've done it several times while listening to your eloquence, Professor. Before you come, I figgered I was thorough. I could go on living as long as my ammunition held out—an' I had two shells left. When I seen your legs outside, I couldn't help but think maybe I had a chance. When you agreed so calm and placid that there wasn't any chance, I figgered it was final—because you're the gent that has still got his arms and legs, and the strength—not me. If you didn't have the heart to try to help yourself, you sure wouldn't take no interest in me.

"That would have settled it"—Boomer's voice revealed a sardonic amusement—"except that you kept on talking, Professor. Your talk about yourself got me to thinking about myself. It's like you said. We're opposites in more ways than one. You're ready to die. I ain't. Your tellin' me you'd squared all your accounts before startin' north got me to thinking. There's still an account or two I got to fix up before I cash in. Yeah, an' I sure aim to square 'em, pardner—with your help.

"Listen." His tone abruptly became more emphatic. "The time for debatin' the proposition is past. Get this straight, Professor. You're going to rise up and make one desperate effort to take me to Jump-off. Maybe you can do it, and maybe you can't. You're sure going to try. During the hour we've been talking, you've been resting. Your feet ain't froze yet, nor your hands. We're maybe fifteen miles north of Jump-off. Downhill, and with the blizzard at your back, we'd ought to make it in five hours—if it can be done."

"But you said, not long ago, that our expectancy of life was less than three hours," protested the professor.

"Settin' here, yes. But bucking the drifts and fighting the wolves off will keep you going. Having a grand-stand seat to all the excitement, and the idea that we're getting closer to Jump-off, will bolster me up some. We can't lose either way. If we make it, that's that. If not, we die trying—not just waiting. That's settled, huh?" The bulky one shifted his position somewhat, as though making a colossal effort to rise. "Let's go, Professor."

"You're such a downright person, Boomer," he reproved. "I have not yet adjusted myself to this—er—disconcerting development. Let us speak plainly. Having decided to die, why should I even attempt to take you down to Jump-off?"

"Don't kid me," said the other harshly. "You're an educated scissor-bill. Even a savage knows he's got to help a fellow man who's in distress, particularly when it ain't putting him out any. You've decided to cash in, ain't you? Well, then, what's the odds if you cash in here, on the way down, or after you've delivered me to Jump-off? Finding me here your accounts ain't squared no more, Professor."

"Fair enough," the professor conceded. "Despite your—er—primitive point of view, you are nimble-witted. Your presence constitutes a moral obligation that I can't avoid. But you have overlooked one thing, Boomer. It would take a brave man indeed to attempt what you suggest. And I am—er—a coward."

"Don't you worry none about that. It's just a proposition of nerve and strength. You got the strength. I got the nerve. We're a good pair that sizes up to one he-man."

"What about the wolves?"

"You got three shells. I got one. When the shells are gone, there's a short-handled ax strapped to the sled. You can use that for close work. I got a knife, and I can still use my right arm."

The professor stared. "Boomer," he breathed. "Will it come to that?"

"And worse," said Boomer. "I ain't

kidding you, pardner. "It's no picnic we're up against."

The professor sat up for a space, huddled and motionless. The hood of his parka was turned toward the low entrance of their cave, where the white-hackled figures crouched. Boomer, who knew men, was silent now. Here was a crisis when further urging, argument, logic, dominant imposing of will upon will would have been fatal he knew. The battle, in that moment, was the professor's alone.

"Boomer," the professor barely whispered the words, "I'm—afraid. You've—gained a wrong idea of me. I didn't know the wolves were so—hideous, as I came up from Jump-off. Those ones we shot, a while ago, they tore limb from limb—Boomer."

"And gnawed their bones." Boomer's words were blunt and harsh. Yet inwardly, in sympathy, he too, writhed with the torment of one facing his executioners.

"Why did I find you here? Why couldn't I have—died alone?"

"Sorry, Professor. I should have fallen off the cliff somewheres else."

"We can't get through the wolves See them waiting, dozens, scores of them, Boomer."

"Hundreds, Professor."

"They'll leap upon us as soon as we appear. They'll drag us down and tear us limb from limb. And—gnaw our bones."

"Not if we jump out fighting, like we mean business. We got to mean business, Professor."

"Look." The professor's shaken voice was almost a wail. "It's a blizzard, Boomer. See the snow driving. Hear the wind. It's cold, terribly cold. We'll never make it to Jump-off! Never in the world!"

"Wind's at our backs," said Boomer. "We're traveling downhill. We can do it, pardner, you and me."

"Boomer!" It was the professor's last stand. "Why—er—the devil should I take you down to Jump-off?"

"Because," said Boomer, "I ain't ready to die. Neither are you, on account of having me on your hands, who's helpless and froze. We both got accounts to square which can only be squared if we make it to Jump-off or pass out fighting. And you'll rest easier in the shadow of them pearly gates, Professor, knowin' that while you may have lived like a scissorbill, you done died like a savage."

The professor had been seated, since crawling into the retreat, with his back to the sled, his legs drawn beneath him in an awkward posture with his snowshoes still on his feet, half buried in the snow wall at his elbow. Now, trembling and breathing heavily like a runner approaching the tape, he rolled forward upon his knees, slowly, because of cramped muscles, and clumsily because his limbs felt numb and lifeless. He planted his right foot beneath him, then his left.

Squatting thus, with the hood of his parka bowed low so that he could peer forth, he spoke, and at the tremulously uttered question, the big man restrained himself with an effort from bellowing his approval aloud.

"Boomer," the professor quavered, "how should I—er—proceed?"

"Good." Boomer grunted. "That's the stuff, old-timer! Now listen, whilst I give you the low-down on wolves and how we aim to make a run for it. Once we're started, you and me won't have much time to talk it over.

"Unlimber your artillery," he directed. "Get set. When you go, jump out spread-eagle. Shoot once as you jump, and yell. I'll give 'em a war whoop, too. I've still got my voice, if nothing else. All this uproar, and you comin' forth like you mean business, will make 'em scatter long enough for us to get going.

"Get this, pardner. Life's a poker

game in which a good bluff is the equal of a royal flush. You're scared. But them mangy devils don't know it. Figuring we're down and out and almost ready to take, they'll be flabbergasted when you bust out roarin' and shootin'. They'll scatter, temporary. They're puzzled. We got to keep them puzzled. If ever in your life it was up to you to play a bluff like a royal flush, it's now.

"There's no pity in them devils, Professor. I'm telling you this now, so you can size up the jack pot. We're only meat, and their ribs is raspin' together. That ain't one pack out yonder. In a way that's bad for us, and in a way it ain't. They're what's left of a dozen packs, the strong ones. That'll be bad when the show-down comes. But it'll also help us to postpone the show-down, them not having any leader to tell 'em when to drag us down.

"When they scatter, move fast. Turn short around. Take holt of the gee pole. One big heave will set up the sled. Then take holt of me around the hips and boost me on the sled. I'm heavy and I can't help myself much. But I got one good arm left, and I'll help to heave myself on. That'll be a ticklish second or two, on account of your having your back to 'em and it looks like we're down. But move fast, and we'll make it. Set me facin' to the rear. They's a hank of harness left. Stick my arm through it an' get going. You got a tough haul over that first big drift. After that, downhill.

"You got all them specifications, pardner?" He measured each word. "O. K. then. It's your deal."

"Wait," said the professor, between set teeth. "One moment, Boomer, while I—er—collect myself."

"Take your time," said Boomer. He, too, was breathing heavily. "When you say the word, pardner. But when you start, make it snappy."

Squatting on his heels, the professor rocked back and forth, his shoulders bowed, the hood of his parka low and outthrust. Less than ten feet away, the advance guard of the wolves waited, crouching. They were shoulder to shoulder in the swirling snow, slanting eyes marking his every move. They did not flinch before him. They swayed as he swayed, their hackles rising as he leaned forward, relaxed as he drew back.

"Boomer," said the professor in a thin voice, "your—er—manner inspires confidence. You say that they will scatter when I leap forth. You understand these creatures, while I—er—have no previous experience to guide me. They look—terrible."

"Jump like you mean business," said Boomer. "Shoot as you jump. Stamp your feet. We'll both yell. Make it a good bluff and they'll back down."

"I'm trying to believe you, Boomer. It's—hard." The professor drew forth his weapon and crooked a nerveless finger through the trigger. "But I'll —try it."

"They'll scatter," said Boomer between his teeth.

"If they don't," said the professor, with a kind of stiff formality in his quavering voice, "it was—er—a pleasure to have met you, Boomer. Sorry—I couldn't have done more."

"Wait," said Boomer hoarsely. "If the ante's too steep, pardner. If it's too tough——"

But the professor, as though he had not heard him, was rising slowly from his haunches, leaning forward.

"Ready, Boomer?"

"Ready," said the big man, with a great intake of breath.

For a space of perhaps two full seconds the professor yet hesitated, poised. Then he leaped forth.

His weapon crashed as he leaped. Above its echoes, his shrill yell rose. From the cave at his back, came Boomer's colossal roar, like a wounded

grizzly bellowing from his lair. For both, that shuddering moment was abysmal and primitive, as in another and earlier gloom hairy men, weaponless save for crudely fashioned clubs, had leaped forth bellowing defiance to beasts no less savage than these.

The wolves scattered. The front ranks shrank back before the flash and roar of the six-shooter, the acrid and terrifying odor of burnt powder, and the bellowing desperation of their late prey. They jostled back, crowding one upon another, formed a larger semicircle. Yet they did not retreat precipitately. They faced their prey, weaving back and forth with lowered heads, flattened ears, and eyes that were flaming and intent; and from the close-packed ranks in the swirling gloom came a whining pandemonium, a champing of jaws.

"Quick!" Boomer directed. "If we wait, they'll jump us. Bust out the sled."

The professor whirled. With a mighty heave, he righted the sled. Boomer was all but buried as the mound caved in. Stooping, the professor laid hold on him and groaned aloud with the effort as he heaved him up.

As he struggled thus with Boomer's helpless bulk, the wolves closed in. From here and there in the converging circle, a great gaunt animal leaped forth from his fellows, darting in, fangs bared, on a quarry now in full view. As Boomer sagged on the rawhide mesh of the sled, he fired beneath the professor's outstretched arm.

"Got 'im," he grunted. "You crippled one. That'll hold 'em for a minute. Gimme your gun, pardner, grab the harness and get going."

The professor obeyed blindly, still dazed by that terrific moment when he had thought to be torn limb from limb, and had yet survived.

He bowed in the harness, amazed at the strength remaining in his limbs. The sled, heavy with its burden, moved. His clumsily wielded snowshoes sank deep as he lunged up the drift. Behind him, Boomer bellowed encouragement.

A few wolves bellied uncertainly along the trail they had broken. Others floundered to the right and left, looking back over their shoulders. But the bulk of the great pack for the moment remained behind, hidden from view in the swirling chaos and the gloom. Only the sound of the mêlée, as they gorged on their fallen fellows, came up to them, borne on the breath of the wind.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE HOME STRETCH.

FROM the point they had just quitted, to the top of the huge drift that choked the canyon, was a distance of perhaps thirty yards. It was, to the professor, an interminable, heartbreaking grade, mountain-high. His snowshoes sank deep at every step. The sled, despite its broad, polished runners, sagged in the loose snow and resisted his efforts. The harness strap, against which one of Boomer's lost huskies had labored, pressed chokingly across shoulder and neck.

Yet he bowed to the task and forged ahead, placing a mittened hand upon each knee, his legs driving like pistons. His thought processes, because of his concentration on the work at hand, were spasmodic; yet in flashes, as his breath gasped between his teeth, he considered the terrific readjustment that had taken place in his affairs, and was amazed.

But a short space before he had, in spirit, taken his leave of life; had been waiting passively for the end, believing it irrevocable and near at hand. Now he was battling for life, hurling defiance at the hostile world into which he had deliberately thrust himself. He had withdrawn in spirit as well as in

body. Jerked ruthlessly from the intellectual plane in which he had appraised his environment, he now was a part of that environment.

It was snow that clogged his snowshoes, swirled and eddied about him. A wind that was like an icy current pressed upon his bowed back. He was on foot, dragging a sled upon which sat a helpless man, his legs frozen and stiff beneath him. Wolves were on the back trail—iron-muscled creatures of flesh and blood who would surge upon them, snarling, when their present ghoulish work was done. These things were not academic, subjective. They were real and tangible, terribly and elementally real.

Why had he done this thing? Because Boomer, a savage, desired a chance to live. Boomer, unlike himself, had not been ready to die. His animal instincts made for life. Because his own great strength had failed, he, the professor, must take up the burden of carrying on.

As he struggled up that interminable drift, knowing that they must hurry, that the crest must be reached before the bulk of the wolves swarmed in pursuit, he strove to condemn Boomer for thus imposing his will upon him, for this ruthlessly denying him the privilege to turn his back on life.

Boomer despised him, no doubt. To the bulky one, he, the professor, was a weakling, a coward, who yet had physical strength that was useful. Boomer was on the sled. He the professor, was in the harness, laboring as Boomer's dogs had labored, putting forth his strength because the dominant one willed it, responding to the bellowed encouragement, even as those lost huskies had given their all. They had died in Boomer's service; he, too, would die.

He strove thus to condemn Boomer, but could not, for certain fires recently kindled roared in his veins. He knew this, with a kind of awe, as his tired muscles forced him yet higher up the slope of the drift. A staggering thing, a miracle, had transpired in that desperate moment when at Boomer's command he had hurtled forth blindly from the retreat, almost into the very jaws of the waiting wolves.

He had feared the wolves, with a shuddering horror that was physical torture. Of his own will he could not have leaped upon them. But Boomer had supplied that will. Boomer had told him that the bluff would be good, and it was good. The wolves had scattered before him. To Boomer belonged the credit; he had been merely Boomer's man, doing as he was bid. And yet he had faced the wolves, and seen them give ground before him.

Ere he reached the crest, the primitive exultance of that moment faded. It had only been a bluff, after all. Had the wolves flung themselves upon him, he would have fallen, terrified, his arms pressed over his face in that ancient and shameful gesture of cowardice. The wolves had not known that he was afraid; that was why the bluff had been good. There would come a show-down before they could reach Jump-off, when a mere pretense of bravery would be of no avail. Boomer, the magnificent, the unafraid, who bellowed defiance at death, would then realize how frail was this thing upon which he had pinned his faith, upon whose strength he had gambled his chance to survive. They had two shells left. When these were spent, what then? Shuddering, the professor closed his mind against that climactic moment.

But a brief space longer, his thoughts were his own. As he labored drunkenly across the crest of the drift, where the chill wind whipped with redoubled fury about him, he wondered anew, and somewhat resentfully, at Boomer's sudden change of front.

Back in their retreat where the wolves

had waited, the bulky one had appeared to listen to his story with a purely academic interest. Yet when the story was done, he had bluntly stated that he, the professor, must take him down to Jump-off. All the while, no doubt, Boomer had merely made a pretense of accepting death as inevitable. While the story was being told, Boomer, the dominant one who forced circumstances, environment, and men to bow before his will, had been studying his man, and in the end had decided that here was a weakling, a coward, whose strength only might be of use to him, provided he could be dominated to the end.

"We're over the top, pardner." Boomer's great voice rolled down with the wind. "Step on it! Here comes our little pets. Show a little speed if you can. While we're moving we got a chance. *O-o-o-wah-h!*" His voice rose in a vast and profane bellow of defiance that told the professor that the pack was upon them. "Beat it, you swivel-jointed, super-heated scum of creation! *Hi-yi! O-o-owah!*"

The great pack was all about them like a ghostly current of living bodies, weaving, shifting, doubling back, appearing and disappearing in the shimmering curtain of driving snow. Those near at hand leaped in snarling, then swerved away. Objects were obscured at five paces.

When at this distance, it was obvious, the famine-mad creatures were nerved to the attack. Yet, even as they leaped, an ancient fear bade them swerve aside. For their quarry walked and roared as men, and fresh in memory were the fire and crash of their terrifying weapons.

Because he could do nothing else, the professor forged ahead. It was downhill now, and the going easier. He shuffled his snowshoes forward, increasing his speed. He felt helpless, in harness like a beast of burden. In some inexplicable fashion, because he had a task before him and was bowing in the harness, his fear of the wolves was not the hideous thing he had imagined. He was aware of their presence, floundering to the right and left. He did not look around, and the very back of his neck, it seemed, was sensitive to the growling and snarling pandemonium that moved with the sled to the rear.

But by some curious reaction, like that of a beast of burden that toils and does not question, he relied on Boomer. Boomer had their weapon, and their two lone shells. It was Boomer who was making this desperate bid for life; Boomer's voice that was raised in defiance.

Other sounds and other knowledge merged in the fabric of the grim reality about him that yet seemed detached and unreal. Wind, snow, cold, and the swirling gloom, became accepted, accustomed facts, and forgotten. He was aware that the attention of the wolves seemed to have concentrated on Boomer. This was, no doubt, because the big man was motionless on the sled, helpless save for one good arm and his bellowing voice. He was almost startled by the realization that for some time past the wolves had been raising a hideous turmoil, a ululating chorus that was undoubtedly the blood cry of the pack. But these things, somehow, were remote. He was bowing in the harness. He was tired. The wolves were Boomer's worry. It was up to him, the professor, to go as far as he could before he dropped.

His knees were weak. He could no longer feel the weight of the sled. At first, the strap across his chest had seemed to burn his flesh. Then it had felt chill, searingly cold. Now he could not feel it at all. He might have been plodding alone, with no sled behind him, no burden upon it.

A ghastly fear seized him. He could not hear Boomer's voice. About him were many sounds—the turmoil of the

wolves, the buffeting of the wind, and distant rumblings in the iron peaks. This chaos of sound was terrifying. Boomer's bellowing defiant voice formed no part of it.

Had the wolves plucked Boomer from the sled? Was even the sled following him? It was a paralyzing thought. He halted and looked back.

He saw Boomer's good arm rise and fall, heard, even through the turmoil, the sharp, deadened thud as the muzzle of his weapon descended upon a broad forehead between short triangular ears. The animal fell back, dazed and floundering. Instantly, the six-shooter roared.

"Go on!" came Boomer's strident voice.

The professor lurched forward, trembling with a surge of overwhelming relief. From all about him, ghostly animals floundered back. They were, for the moment, alone, while a ghoulish turmoil that he now recognized broke out in the rear.

"Why in blue-hinged Halifax did you stop?" bellowed Boomer. "Ain't I told you we got to keep moving?"

"Thought you were gone," the professor shouted over his shoulder. "Couldn't hear you. Sorry."

"'Sall right." Boomer's voice came muffled and hoarse. "About to jump us, anyway. One more shell, Professor."

The blizzard was reaching its pinnacle now. Time and space no longer were measurable quantities.

Direction, for the professor, meant nothing. He lurched downhill, knowing it was downhill because that way meant the least effort. Walls of driving snow were at his elbow. He did not look back, but he knew that less than ten feet behind him Boomer and the sled were obscured. He lowered his head at times, and with a clublike arm, flailed the snow from the hood of his parka. He thought vaguely of Boomer, the helpless one, seated on the sled, motionless, a whitened image beneath a deepening mantle of snow.

Dizzy, swirling, chaotic, was the world through which he moved. The yielding footing unfolded beneath him in hummocks and rounded ridges. Down these he gravitated, turning aside from levels, and seeking always a downward course.

His knees were oddly weak. They buckled beneath him, so that at times he floundered in a crouching posture. At other times, concentrating upon this phenomenon, he strode stiff-legged, and found himself cackling foolishly at his ludicrous gait.

The wolves were about them again. He could see two, sometimes three, floundering alongside, whitened creatures like segments of moving snow. Almost underfoot, they snarled up at him, shaking their heads with an odd, sniffing sound as they dislodged the snow from bristling hackles. From behind and all about came other snarlings and sniffings from the invisible pack.

He heard Boomer's voice. It came with less volume, hoarse, somewhat muffled. The big man was growing weak, no doubt. The flame of life in his huge frame was burning low.

Only his courage, the iron soul of him, bellowed on. Tears blinded the professor's eyes, tears of futility, of desperation. He, too, was growing weak. His strength was failing. He felt sorry for Boomer—Boomer, the savage, who desired life. Boomer had depended upon him, upon his strength. Boomer's courage was as great as ever; but the strength upon which he had wagered his chances of life was failing.

Shuffling down a long drift he was aware that to his left, another and sharper incline dipped down. He turned aside, bracing his hands upon his weak knees. The sled crowded hard upon him. He was sliding, the snow slithering underfoot.

"Easy, Professor," Boomer's hoarse voice warned. "Might be a crevasse."

But it was not a crevasse. The snow eddied, changed in form and substance. It became a solid wall that loomed on three sides, darker in hue, blue-gray, with feathery patches of snow on its glistening surface.

"Get going, Professor," said Boomer, in strident command. "Move fast. We're right under the glacier."

But his words carried no weight to the other. Knowledge had come to him. In some previous life, æons and ages before, he had stood thus with walls at his back, the sloping line of the drift before him. Only, now, the wolves were less cautious, more intent. They stood shoulder to shoulder on the sloping edge of the drift, in full view, their broad heads weaving in indecision as their slanting eyes remained fixed upon their quarry.

"Wait," said the professor. He reached up, knowing what his exploring fingers would find on the tiny ledge. "Some coffee, Boomer," he pleaded. "Hot coffee. I'm—exhausted. Slept here on the way up. Left my outfit here. Hot coffee, Boomer, and—perhaps I can go on. It'll only require a moment—eh, Boomer?"

Seated on the sled, like a white-mantled image, Boomer turned his head slowly. He peered up at the wall, glanced at the wolves, and back at his companion. He nodded.

"Move fast. The wolves'll wait, us being in a hole again. Maybe the world won't cave in on us. Yeah, you've earned a shot of coffee, pardner. Won't do you much good. Clear your head maybe."

The professor knelt over the condiment case. He groaned aloud at the helplessness of his stiffened fingers before the blue flame wavered.

When the white steam floated above the aluminum cup, Boomer spoke hoarsely.

"Turn the sled around, pardner," he muttered. "We got to get a flying start as soon as you get that shot under your belt."

The professor did as bid, then reached for the cup.

"You first, Boomer."

"No," said Boomer. The hood of his parka was turned away. "Too far gone for hot coffee. If you're a white man, don't even leave me smell it. Inhale it. An' let's go."

The professor drank the steaming liquid, reveling in the fiery torture of it. It seemed to sear his throat, burn like a furnace within him. Some of the foglike miasma hanging over his consciousness seemed to dissipate a little.

"You slept here, huh?" muttered Boomer. "Right smack under the Sumalt Glacier. Joke on you, Professor. If I wasn't so close to the pearly gates, I'd laugh."

"Boomer," said the professor, querulously, "why not stay here, eh? I'm awfully tired, exhausted. We can't make it to Jump-off, Boomer."

"Got to," said Boomer. "Only one shell left. Get into the harness, pardner. See that big-chested buzzard at the head of the class?" The speaker's parka was turned toward the line of wolves jostling on the face of the drift. At the top, a great, battle-scarred one stood, slanting eyes upon them. "I'll take him. We got to throw a scare into 'em to get out of this hole."

"Coming up," protested the professor, "it required—two hours, Boomer, to reach this point. It's too far. I—we can't make it. It's—er—impossible."

"Less than an hour," said Boomer, "going down. The way we're traveling. Listen." It was as though he were calling on the last of his forces. "Don't argue. Or pretty quick you won't be talking to nobody but yourself."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said the big man slowly,

"that whilst you're arguing, *I'm passing out.*"

The professor set down his cup, pushed aside the condiment case, and staggered to his feet. "Dying?" he questioned in an awed voice. "Now?"

"Whilst I'm setting here," Boomer muttered. "Too cold. Froze tight as a drum. Whilst we're battling, I'm hanging on. Settin' here, I'm losing my grip. Get going, partner. Less than an hour to Jump-off. We've come too far—to quit now."

The professor lurched forward, raised up the harness, and thrust an arm through it.

"Don't lose your grip, Boomer," he pleaded. "Don't leave me alone. Er—hang on."

With his good arm, Boomer raised the weapon, training it on the battle-scarred wolf at the head of the drift.

"When I shoot," he directed, "travel."

The professor bowed in the harness. Boomer's gun crashed deafeningly. The whole world shook with the impact.

The battle-scarred wolf leaped up and out, cringed in mid-air, doubled into an inert, bristling mass that slithered down the drift, trailed by crimson snow. In a living wave, the pack followed. Forth from the welter of jostling bodies, the sled leaped.

Boomer raised his smoking weapon. A flirt of the wrist sent it arching past the corner of the wall and into the snarling mêlée.

"No gun," he bellowed. "No shells. *O-o-wah!* It's the home stretch, Professor."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE RING-TAILED SAVAGE.

AT a clumsy run, because of his snowshoes and the weariness of his muscles, the professor charged down the slope. Loose snow flew beneath his flailing feet. Behind him, the sled careened, and upon it, Boomer swayed, his good arm flung aloft.

"Attaboy!" He encouraged in almost maudlin glee. *"Hi-iyi-i!* There's still a sprint left in the old horse, eh? Don't kid me, pardner. You're a ring-tailed savage. What a pair we'd have made on the trail! Boomer and the Professor—the 'Malemute Kids!' *O-o-wah!*"

But the professor's strength was born of mortal terror.

The coffee had cleared his brain. As his mental processes quickened into life, his impressions became more vivid. In pitiless detail, facts arrayed themselves before him. Before he had traversed fifty yards from the niche in the base of the blue ice wall, he had faced these facts and knew in his soul the desperation of the trapped animal for whom there is no escape.

Boomer was dying. In the first stage of their flight, ending in the niche they had just quitted, he had relied upon Boomer. Blindly, as a beast of burden that toils and does not question, he had placed his faith in the dominant personality. He had feared the wolves, in that first lap, but in a detached way only, when they had drawn uncomfortably close and had snarled at him. He had labored through chaos, his thoughts chaotic; and with him always had been the knowledge that Boomer was on the sled, Boomer the unafraid, who bellowed defiance.

But now, Boomer was dying. To all intents and purposes he was already dead, being helpless save for his voice and his one pitiful arm. Presently his voice would cease, and his good arm fail. To him, the professor, had passed the leadership. In the show-down, he must face the wolves alone.

This show-down would come soon. The wolves were back at the niche. The sound of their feasting came down with the wind. A few of the lesser ones would remain behind, snuffling hopefully in the crimson snow, but the bulk

of the great pack would presently swarm forth in pursuit, raising their blood cry as they found the trail. When they arrived, he must face them without shells, without weapons, and alone.

In unconscious muscular reaction to his terror, he continued to plunge forward with spasmodic strength. He knew that this was futile. According to Boomer's calculations, they were more than three miles from Jump-off. Long before he could traverse those three miles, the wolves would be upon them. They would never reach Jump-off. The wolves would tear them limb from limb —Boomer's helpless body, his own quivering, shrinking flesh. Yet he leaped forward, though his breath whistled between his teeth and his knees sagged beneath him. It was a matter of minutes now.

Bitterly, even in his extremity, he pondered this thing that had befallen him. He had not planned it thus. Far away in another world where there were sunshine and flowers and birds singing, he had pictured his death above Jump-off. It was to have been a calm and placid event, to be met philosophically with folded hands. He had not planned on the wolves, nor on Boomer, nor on this hideous form of death. Sardonic gods of fate, who had given him a birthright of fear, had decreed that he must die in terror—in terror and in cowardice. For he could not face the wolves. Boomer had mentioned an ax, strapped to the sled. But he knew that he would not touch the ax, when the show-down came. He would crouch, shrinking, sobbing perhaps, with his arms pressed over his face.

The blizzard, having passed its pinnacle, was losing its force. Moment by moment the buffeting of the wind abated. The swirling obscurity of driving snow thinned out. Objects and contours took form in the strengthening light—the base of a cold rampart to the left, and, sloping down from his feet, long ridges, low hollows, and mountainlike drifts of eternal snow.

Boomer was singing in a vast, hoarse, yet oddly melodious voice. Something within the professor responded to the spectacle of the bulky one, dying, yet lifting up his voice in song at the threshold of death.

"You need not wait for me,
Down on Egypt's sands——"

What of Boomer when the wolves swarmed upon them? His great body would be helpless, but the iron soul of him would roar defiance as he fell. Before he fell, before the wolves leaped upon him, there would be a moment when he would look to his partner for help.

A shuddering wave of self-condemnation almost akin to nausea swept the professor at this thought; he, too, would be helpless when the show-down came —chained by his cowardice. The shame of a lifetime could not equal the shame of that moment when Boomer, the magnificent, the unafraid, who was incapable even of understanding cowardice, would appeal to him in vain. Because he, the professor, was still able to stand upright and yet had strength, Boomer would expect him to snatch up the ax and die fighting.

"Repay—repay!" bellowed Boomer, singing of Dangerous Dan McGrew.

The professor knew that he would not grasp the ax. He would yearn for the will to extend his hand and grasp it, but the will would be lacking. In that moment, he would willingly exchange his soul for the courage to fight for Boomer—Boomer, the savage, who loomed above all other men, whom he had learned to respect during the previous age-long hours for all those qualities that he himself lacked—but in vain. For he was a coward. The hands that might have grasped the ax would be pressed over his eyes in a shame-

ful gesture, while sardonic gods laughed.

The blizzard having passed, the world was etched in ghostly outline. The wind was but a whisper, a frigid tide growing more cold. To the north, a gray fog yet obscured the heavens, but to the southwest, jeweled stars glittered frostily. Far below stretched the great expanse, snow-mantled, like frozen billows in a motionless sea.

From behind, came a clear, bell-like chorus, that instantly swelled in volume. The professor looked back, his breath sobbing hoarsely between his teeth. He knew what he would see. He had been thankful for each precious second that had reeled by before that myriad chorus had echoed down with the wind. Yet when he saw the wolves, he cringed as from a blow.

Their back trail was but a tiny line that marred the long slope to the rear. On the crest, and for some distance down the slope, this line had become thicker and darker in hue. It was the pack, following in single file and unbroken column, along the trail.

*"O-o-wah!"* bellowed Boomer, raising his good arm and shaking his fist. "Here they come."

The professor made no reply. He could hear the blood pounding in his ears as he stumbled on.

"You've been traveling fast," Boomer shouted. "We're almost to Jump-off. Two more ridges to cross. We'll fight it through, pardner."

Still the professor said nothing. He continued to lurch forward, conscious only that precious distance yet intervened between themselves and that swelling chorus.

"Listen," Boomer instructed him, "I'm loosening the ax. But keep going till I yell, 'Come and get it.' They won't rush us right off the reel. They'll figger we've still got a gun. But they'll sure rush us before we get to Jump-off. It's their last chance. When I yell, grab the ax and start swinging. It ain't any cinch, pardner. Give 'em everything you got. Once they jump us you got to make hash out of a dozen of 'em before they're discouraged. D'you get me?"

The professor plunged on. Once, in his boyhood, he had seen a rabbit in a large clover field hopelessly attempt to escape from a pack of baying mongrels. He knew now how that rabbit felt as it had scurried, squealing, with no burrow near at hand, no rock or bush or fence row beneath which it might seek shelter; a fluffy handful of life lifting up a futile voice in protest against death, while the leaping mongrels yelped their delight.

The pack was silent now. But the *pad-padding* of their feet was close at hand, and their muffled snarls.

*"O-o-wah,* you blackhearted scum of creation!" Boomer spoke fluently and with emphasis as the pack surged upon them, split in twain, encircled them. Peering back, in that suffocating moment, the professor saw the bulky fellow menacing the floundering animals with upraised knife.

He was waiting for Boomer's word, that would spell the end of life.

"Mush on!" he heard Boomer's voice, even as his shoulders sagged and his knees bent beneath him. "Don't slow up!" Then: "Come and get it. The ax, pardner—*the ax!"*

As though this signal had dried up forces in the deeps of him, the professor collapsed. Even as he fell, he buried his face in his arms. The sled, carried on by its own momentum, creaked to a standstill beside him.

For a split second there was a silence. It was broken by a slithering of snow as the pack bellied forward, and by a startled curse.

"Get up!" Boomer's great voice was directly above him. "Get up! Grab the ax! Fight—before it's too late!"

The professor groveled hard against the sled like a burrowing animal. His

face was pressed against his arms. Great shuddering tremors shook him from head to foot.

The weight of a heavy body descended upon him. Boomer rolled to the snow, hitched himself forward with his good arm.

"Listen!" the bulky one's voice hissed in his ear. "With both of us down the deal's about finished. But I'm taking a chance. You ain't a scissorbill, pardner. Only on the outside. Underneath you're a savage. I've bet my life on that point. Get up and fight."

The wolves did not instantly leap in to the attack. They formed a crouching circle, a narrowing intent circle. Their quarry was down. And yet an ancient instinct, a law of the fang older than time, bade them pause; for these recumbent figures, apparently helpless, were men.

"Listen, pardner." Boomer spoke rapidly. "I'm down and out. You're still able to swing an ax. If I was able, I'd massacre them devils and take you down to Jump-off. But I ain't, and do you aim to leave me lay without raisin' a hand? Old Boomer, who never before in his life has asked for help?"

"I can't! I can't!" The words were torn from the groveling man's laboring chest.

"You can. Look——" He clumsily dragged the mittens from the professor's upraised hands and flung them aside. "I'm putting the ax in your hand, pardner. You've got a holt of it. Jump up and fight!"

In a convulsive reaction to the man's dominance, the professor's trembling fingers closed on the smooth, hard handle of the ax. But he did not rise.

The crouching circle was converging. Only a trick of wolfish psychology kept the pack at bay. Shoulder to shoulder they crept forward, whining aloud in their eagerness. But among these mighty remnants of nameless packs was no acknowledged leader. Had a single bold one leaped upon their quarry, the whole band, as at a signal, would have leaped. They hesitated, while seconds that represented the margin between life and eternity ticked by.

"Not on my account, pardner"—even Boomer's great voice was cracking beneath the strain—"but yours. Listen. That red-headed kid, McBain. He called you yellow. You didn't fight. All your life you've wished you had another chance. I'm giving it to you. *It's now.* It's your last chance. Thank your stars you got an ax. It's in your hand. Get up and fight!"

The professor raised his head and peered over a shielding arm. The wolves loomed above him in the pitiless starlight, cheek by jowl, and unbroken circle. They were almost at arm's length, powerful animals, fangs glistening, opalescent eyes intent.

He shrank down, shuddering. "I'm afraid." His voice was almost a sob.

"Afraid!" Boomer repeated the word with savage emphasis. "Of course, you're afraid. So am I. Who in blue-hinged Halifax ain't afraid?"

It was merely a desperate outburst. Having placed his bets and lost, Boomer was no longer arguing.

"Lie there, scissorbill, and take note on how a savage cashes in. *O-o-wah!*" He writhed over on his frozen elbow, his back to the professor, and flourished his good arm aloft. His great hand grasped the knife. "Come on, you black-hearted devils! Which of you trails with me?" His meaningless words were a last defiance. "One arm. One knife. One wolf—come and get it——"

He did not actually see the professor rise up and tower above him. He grasped only the fact. Legs like pillars straddled him. The ax heaved up and back even as the crouching circle leaped.

"Excuse it, please." Boomer raised his hoarse voice with the exultance of one who has seen dreams come true.

"You're a ring-tailed savage. Treat 'em rough, pardner. *O-o-wah——*"

The remainder was lost beneath the engulfing pack.

## CHAPTER IX.

### BOOMER'S LAST EFFORT.

IN spirit the professor had groveled in the snow. Now he stood erect. Bestial strength surged in his sinews. The heavy, keen-edged ax was light in his grasp.

A second unbelievable thing transpired as the ax whistled down. The blade sank, haft deep in rampant hackles, shearing through flesh and bone. Other viselike fangs were upon him, piercing the heavy parka at shoulder, arm, and hips; but beneath those surging bodies, he knew, a stricken animal lay writhing in death throes.

He had killed a wolf. As he swung the dripping blade in a mighty arc to the right, then to the left, clearing a momentary circle about him, the knowledge of it roared in his veins. With his ax and the strength of his arms, he had killed a wolf.

Hurled back by his furious lunges, the wolves yet retained their grip upon his clothing. The heavy parka was stripped from him in shreds, hung in flapping streamers. His left arm was bare from elbow to shoulder. As he swung the ax again, he saw that this arm was gashed. But he felt no pain, felt only a primitive pride that it was a muscular arm, with tendons standing forth in great white ridges.

He did not reckon on his chances to survive. His thought processes, save the most elemental, were suspended. He swung the ax with a savagery of pent-up, bitter years.

Crippled wolves groveled, spurned underfoot by slavering creatures leaping in waves to the attack. Fangs clashed harshly, like sprung traps, hard by his throat. Fangs tore his arms, shearing through the flesh like talons. The handle of the ax was slippery. Boomer, between his legs, was ripping, rending from beneath with his one good arm, his knife flashing in the crimson snow.

The professor's back was to the sled, a frail backing indeed. Yet it was sufficient in that the wolves swerved aside, did not leap over this barrier. They attacked from three sides; and in this great arc, his ax swung, parried, cleaved, wreaked havoc. In solid footing, being equipped to harry, leap upon, and drag down bull moose whose withers tower seven feet above splayed hoofs, the wolves must have engulfed him. But they leaped from loose snow, clumsily, fell back and floundered anew to the attack.

In flashes, as from a great distance, he knew that he was the center of a vast turmoil of noise. From his feet, Boomer was bellowing with each thrust and slash. The wolves were raising their blood cry as they broke in bristling, gnashing waves upon him. Above the tumult rose an alien voice, a strange, pagan voice. It was his own. He, too, was roaring with the lust of battle.

Thus he fought through moments that might have been æons; while the sound of conflict grew dim.

He became aware, presently, that the tumult had ceased. As from a blood-red mist his consciousness emerged. He was leaning on his ax, like one wrapped in thought.

High and cold, the myriad stars glittered. In a far-flung and frigid majesty lay the snow-mantled world. At a respectful distance, the wolves were circling, sullen, hyenalike. Near at hand was another circle of wolves, but these lay in mangled confusion, stark and motionless, heaped one upon the other. Within this latter circle he stood, leaning on his ax; and Boomer was plucking weakly at a straddled leg.

"Let's go," Boomer was muttering.

"Don't you hear me—pardner? Let's go. This'll hold 'em. They won't pester us—no more."

He looked down at Boomer, curiously, lying like a great, helpless insect in the dark, trampled snow underfoot; and became aware that he himself, standing thus with legs ridiculously spraddled, was a scarecrow of a man, half naked from the waist up, his clothing hanging in shreds and streamers that rattled harshly to the icy current of the wind. A bizarre, gory figure; yet he still stood, triumphant on the field of battle, leaning on his ax.

"Boomer," he said. "It was—er—a good fight."

"Good fight!" echoed Boomer. "Sweet—hinges of Halifax! You slaughtered 'em."

"It's odd, Boomer. I feel like a slave who has—er—cast off his chains. These wolves," his words were almost wistful, "I killed them with my ax, didn't I, Boomer?"

"Sure did, pardner." Knowing the need for haste, the bulky one yet permitted the glory of that moment; for the professor spoke as one whose tattered parka is the raiment of kings. "Sure did. Couldn't have done better—myself. I couldn't—help much, but I was—with you, pardner." He, too, spoke with pride. "Some of the crippled ones, I got—with my knife."

"Now," said the professor, casting aside his ax with an effort, because his stiffened fingers cleaved to the icy handle, "I will take you down to Jump-off."

"Maybe you will and maybe you won't," muttered Boomer. "What's the odds? You slaughtered 'em."

With a prodigious effort that caused the stars to reel above him, he heaved Boomer on the sled. He placed the ax beside him. He moved slowly, in stilted fashion, as if encased in armor. The web of his snowshoes, dark and congealed, crackled as he moved. Stooping, he thrust an arm through the harness, stood stiffly erect and wrapped the remnant of his parka carefully about him.

He paid no heed to the wolves as he broke out the sled and moved away. The pack was behind him. Some were alive; others were dead. He knew that all would remain behind.

"Two more ridges," Boomer chanted, the hood of his parka sunk on his chest. "Two more ridges to cross."

Looking back, the professor saw that the circle of wolves had become a dark blot on the wavering glory of the glistening slope.

He fell before he achieved the crest of the first ridge. He did not know that he had fallen until he was down. He struggled to hand and knee, then stood erect. Life was sinking low within him, as though the inner man were withdrawing deeper and deeper into an insensate shell. Yet his senses were clear. He heard clearly, saw clearly. He was aware of Boomer's maudlin mutterings, the creaking of the sled runners, the irregular crunching of his snowshoes, the glitter of the stars, and the sighing of the wind across the frozen grandeur of the world.

He halted to rest on the crest, squatting on his haunches. Boomer's querulous voice came to him.

"Go on," croaked the big man. "leave me be. Joke on you, pardner—fetchin' me this far. Leave me here. Can't make it over the next ridge—both of us. Get going. Keep moving. Don't stop. So long, you blasted—savage."

"No," the professor whispered, "that's a—er—humorous idea. We'll both—reach Jump-off.

Having achieved his feet, he staggered to the base of the hollow without falling. Thereafter his progress was painfully slow. His energy had gone from him. He felt like a giant with the strength of a pygmy. He fell many times, and rose again, toiling up the

slope. He fell on the crest and did not rise, but floundered forward, inch by inch through the engulfing snow.

"Repay—*repay!*" croaked Boomer, singing again of Dangerous Dan McGrew. There was an incongruous note of triumph in the all but meaningless words.

When the professor's pygmy strength failed, and he could no longer make any progress whatsoever, his senses also were growing blurred and dim. Yet he saw, near at hand down the slope, certain rounded hillocks, closely grouped; and above the snow, stone chimneys from which smoke trailed. Sparks belched up at intervals with the smoke, and he knew that these sparks were rising from the maw of roaring, red-bellied heaters.

It was Jump-off, where heat was, and life and fellow men. The hundred yards intervening might have been the space between stars. He was down. His strength had failed, with the utter failure that lies beyond the outermost limits of endurance.

"Sorry, Boomer," he whispered, taking for granted that the big man saw what he had seen, and appreciated by what narrow a margin they had fallen short of life.

"Huh?" croaked Boomer. He did not raise his bowed head. "What say, pardner?"

"Can't go on," said the professor. Even speaking was a colossal effort. "Sorry."

"Through, eh? Don't see nothin'," Boomer explained. "Passing out, How far to Jump-off?"

"Close. Awfully close, Boomer. I saw the chimneys—and sparks." There was a shade of disappointment in the professor's voice.

"Tough break. Should have left me behind. But we still got an ace in the hole. I'll give 'em a yell. Maybe they'll hear it. Maybe they won't. Hundred to one shot. First—got to tell you something. When I give 'em a yell, I'm done. Can you hear me, pardner? Mustn't talk too loud. Save my voice."

"I can hear you, Boomer."

"That dying business—you talked about—back yonder. Changed your mind, huh? You'd like to live—now?"

"Yes," the professor whispered, "I'd like to live—now."

"Those wolves. You rose up—slaughtered 'em. After I figgered you'd quit. Why?"

"Because you put the ax in my hand, Boomer. You said you were afraid. Still you had—er—fought on. So could I."

"*O-o-wah!*" croaked Boomer. "That squares—my accounts. Listen. Back yonder, where we talked, under the sled, I knew I was through. Shouldn't have lasted this long. But I'm tough—awful tough. All the doctors in the world—couldn't have saved me. Froze solid—except one arm. But I made you—fetch me down."

"Why, Boomer?"

"You thought—you was yellow. Ready to die—thinking you was yellow. I was sure you was—O. K. Knew you'd have to fight the wolves. All your life—scared of wolves. Never fought 'em. But back yonder with your ax—you slaughtered 'em. Fought like a savage. Never be scared of wolves—no more. Scared, maybe—but slaughter 'em. What was it you said—back there? Slave—no chains." His parka sunken on his chest, he repeated the words. "Slave—no chains."

"But why, Boomer? Why did you do this for me, a—er—scissorbill?"

"Savage," corrected Boomer. "I done it, on account of that red-headed kid—McBain. He sent you up here—beyond Jump-off. Told you—you was yellow. I proved you wasn't—and brought you back.

"Wisht I could see you for a second—when I tell you this——" Dying, the big man chuckled. "I'm McBain—

Boomer McBain that's me. Knew you when you—told your story. I sent you out—I brought you back. Fair enough, eh?

"Listen," he muttered, as the professor would have spoken. "Can't talk no more. Got to give 'em—a yell." And straightway, after an interval during which his rasping intake of breath was plainly audible, there emanated, from his rigid bulk, a bellow of colossal volume:

"Shorty! McPherson! *O-o-o-wah!*"

Even the professor's waning consciousness knew that this was Boomer's last effort.

Far down the slope, as the echoes of that vast shout died away, a figure emerged, as from the snow, hard by a smoking chimney. Galvanized into action, this one whirled, gestured frantically. Others rose up beside him, three, four. They stooped as they donned snowshoes. They charged up the slope in single file. The one in the lead, breaking trail, was a short, broad person who bellowed encouragement as he ran.

## BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

### The Kingbird

THIS well-known, remarkable, and pugnacious bird may be found in nearly all parts of the country, migrating to the north a month or two later than most birds.

The kingbird is also called the flycatcher because its chief amusement and occupation is catching flies, at which it is particularly skillful. Kingbirds are quarrelsome and very jealous when another bird approaches what they consider their territory, although they look mild enough when perched on a limb.

The kingbird is rather attractive in appearance, with its dark-brown, almost black wings and back, and its white breast. The tip of its tail is also like its breast.

The nest is usually built in an orchard, for here food is more abundant and in case insects and grasshoppers become scarce the kingbird resorts to various kinds of berries, although he does not seem to fancy the fruit trees, such as cherry or peach, apple, or pear. The nest is placed at almost any height from the ground wherever there is a suitable position, the bird seldom making efforts to conceal it. The outside consists of coarse stalks of dry grass, lined with slender grass, horsehair, or other soft material. The eggs are generally three to five in number and colored a yellowish white, marked with a few well-defined dark and light-brown spots. The birds often build and hatch twice in a season.

The kingbird has no song, only a shrill, guttural twitter. As insects approach, he snaps at them and seldom if ever misses. Beetles, grasshoppers, crickets, and winged insects of all descriptions, even bees, form his principal summer food. Toward autumn berries constitute a large part of his diet. Berries are swallowed whole. So are grasshoppers, unless they are too large, when the flycatcher pounds the unfortunate insect against the ground, breaking it into parts. After swallowing a beetle or grasshopper the bird remains quietly digesting it, and soon regurgitates the hard parts, wings, legs, seeds of berries and other indigestible sections.

One of the most remarkable traits of this bird is the courage and affection which he displays for his mate and young. With skill and daring he will successfully attack and drive off larger birds, such as hawks, crows, and jays. When there is no cause for him to assert his bravery he is an example of meekness.

# All Black

## By Hugh F. Grinstead

*Author of "All a Mule Can Do," etc.*

"INJUNS is all fools, no trouble to skin 'em blind," "Old Hank" Foster was wont to say. "Ain't a mite o' use spendin' good money to eddicate 'em. They got to have their money took away from 'em, an' they're just as pleased over the brass watch chains an' glass rubies that I sell 'em as they would be over somethin' more endurin'."

It was thus that Hank endeavored to excuse his questionable methods of separating the unwary savage from his money. It was at Greasewood, a little agency town near the border, that he set up what he chose to call a "gift shop," in an old adobe shack where there was just enough light to insure him against mistakes in counting money. His goods sold better where there was not too much light. With a quart or so of near-rubies, imitation diamonds, brass chains and rings, spread out on the rude counter, he awaited patiently the coming of his customers—victims would have been a better word.

He was not old at all, he just seemed old. Almost as far back as he could remember he had been called Old Hank. When he was a youngster, he had looked with disfavor upon the playful antics of other boys; and while his companions engaged in youthful diversions, he sat morosely apart, planning how he might beguile one of them into trading a ten-cent jackknife for a marble that had cost him no more than a penny. Big profits on every deal was his motto, and he wasn't particular about the methods adopted to get them. For reasons that are obvious, he never stayed very long in one place.

It so happened that he had drifted about as far south as he could get and remain under the protection of the Stars and Stripes. From his point of view, Greasewood was an ideal loca-

tion for birds of his feather. Two Indian reservations within touch, where every so often Uncle Sam's dusky wards received their quota of spending money. As a rule, the noble savage looks with disdain upon the savings bank of the paleface, and his money flows quickly into the channels of trade, legitimate or otherwise.

Just a few miles down the river toward the head of the California Gulf lay the land where "Spanish is spoke and tequila is drunk."

Hank arrived at Greasewood midway between pay days at the agency, and since his prospective customers were never burdened with loose cash for longer than a week, business of all kinds was at a low ebb. This fact troubled Hank not at all, for he often made his easiest money when the Indians were hard up. When a man is out of food or tobacco, he will part with his most prized possessions at a sacrifice in order to get the wherewithal to buy these necessaries. Once he had given an old Hopi Indian a dollar and a half for a turquoise that he later sold for ten dollars. It took some haggling and much lying to do it, but both were part of his stock in trade.

Hank liked to sit and listen to the talk of chance visitors of his own race. He never talked a great deal except when extolling the virtues of something he had to sell, or condemning that which he would buy. Nevertheless, he encouraged conversation in others, for he sometimes got valuable information from sources which appeared least promising.

"Old Dad" Scott, who from time to time freighted in supplies from the railroad, frequently dropped in to satisfy his curiosity and, incidentally, to spin a few of his favorite yarns. He found an agreeable listener in Greasewood's latest acquisition; for it was one of Hank's rules of business to make the genteel loafer welcome. He wanted people to be seen coming into his place whether they bought or not.

"Looks like you got enough gewgaws an' gimcracks to fix up all the squaws on the reservation," the old freighter observed as he eyed Hank's display. "Injuns go in a heap fer bright an' shiny things. I remember the time when they'd take a silver dollar quicker'n they would a ten-dollar gold piece, account of it bein' shinier an' bigger. You can't fool 'em none about money now, but looks like they lack judgment about a heap of things."

"Uh-huh," Hank prompted, scenting something that might interest him.

"Ain't been more'n three four year ago that some Cocopahs from down on the reservation about the head of the gulf in old Mex was peddlin' black pearls in Yuma, tradin' 'em fer a bottle of mescal or maybe gittin' as much as ten dollars fer the best of 'em," dad continued.

"That so?" Hank evinced just enough interest to keep his visitor talking.

"Yes, an' some joolry fellers that knowed allowed them black an' gray pearls that come from along the banks of the Gulf of Californy is about the best they is, an' that they'll bring all the way up to a thousand dollars apiece, some of 'em more. Might be the Indians stole 'em is how they come they was sellin' so cheap. A Cocopah wouldn't know a heap about what a pearl was worth. They ain't by rights pearl fishers, but they trade with the tribes that is."

"Cocopahs, you say?" Hank queried with a mild show of interest. The old freighter went on.

"Yes, them Cocopahs usta be scattered all along the Colorado River, some on this side an' some on the Mexican side. When our gov'ment got to payin' 'em money an' issuin' rations, some of them Mexican Cocopahs come over on this side so's to git their names

in the pot. They all look an' talk alike, so there was no tellin' which was which after they mixed up with these on this side an' was counted. They still got kin on the other side of the line, an' they do a heap of traffickin' back an' forth unbeknownst."

Thus by keeping quiet and showing but little interest, Hank had learned something that promised to be to his advantage. He asked no more questions at that time, and gave no indication whatever that he was in the least interested in Cocopah Indians and the black pearls of Lower California.

Indians visited his little shop frequently. A few bought trifles, but for the most part they stood around sorrowfully regarding the glittering array of flashy ornaments, lamenting the fact that they must wait until another pay day before they could possess any of them. Most of them knew enough English to name the thing they wanted and understand the price. All could speak Spanish fairly well in addition to their own language.

One greasy brave came often, and would sit long without saying a word. The second or third time he came he grunted and pointed to a ring with a red setting of colored glass.

"Gen-u-ine ruby, guaranteed not to change color if you keep it a hundred years. Worth five dollars, but you can carry it away if you gimme just one dollar," Hank explained, reverting to his old formula, regardless of the probability that the Indian understood none of it but the price he had named.

"Two bits," offered the Indian, holding up a silver quarter.

Hank shook his head. He would never consent to take twenty-five cents for an article that had cost him all of two dollars a dozen. A mere fifty-per-cent profit was not to be thought of. He wished he had asked two dollars instead of one, then he might have been able to get the half of it. But evidently the Indian had no more than the single coin he had shown. He manifested no desire to haggle, and presently took his leave.

He returned the following day, and after his usual period of silence, he pointed to the ring, laid his quarter on the counter, and took three greasy cards from beneath his blanket. Hank understood readily enough that the Indian wished to gamble his quarter against the ring he coveted. He shook his head again. He never gambled, though on occasion both eyes and mouth had watered with genuine grief when he witnessed the ease with which some card sharp separated an Indian from his money. But gambling was risky, and he demanded certain profits always. Why take chances, with so many sure methods as there were for fleecing the unwary?

When the Indian knew that his proposition to gamble with the white man had been rejected, he pocketed his coin without revealing any disappointment. He sat and smoked a little while before he made a move to leave. He appeared to be a good-natured fellow, and Hank determined to try a little conversation on him.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Me Cocopah John," was the reply.

Right away Hank's interest picked up. Recalling the old freighter's story, he associated Cocopahs and black pearls. It would be perfectly safe to question this ignorant Indian, who would never guess his motive.

"You been Mexico?" he next added, imitating the broken English of the Indian as nearly as he could. The Indian nodded.

"See big water?"

"Mebbeso five six times see-um."

Hank hesitated a little while before putting the direct question his casual inquiries had been leading up to. He was glad the Indian understood a little English, for his own Spanish was

pretty bad. He had planned to approach the subject casually, but the Indian was moving toward the door, would soon be gone.

"You savvy black pearl?" he finally ventured.

The beady eyes of Cocopah John betrayed a momentary interest, in which there was a hint of suspicion; but every emotion was quickly masked as he turned an expressionless face toward his questioner.

"*Perla negra* no much plenty," he calmly responded.

The answer was rather noncommittal, and not as personal as Hank had hoped. He saw that he would be compelled to put his questions directly if he hoped to gain the information he wanted.

"Trade-um heap for black pearl," he said, indicating how much he would give by holding up together the ring and the bracelet, along with a necklace of glass beads.

"No got-um *perlas,* no want-um heap squaw stuff," the Indian replied by way of explaining that he had no pearls and that he didn't need so much finery for a squaw to wear. "Want money buy tobac—blanket mebbeso."

Hank understood well enough that the Indian could very well use ready cash. The white man was not averse to paying money if he could be sure of turning the investment over quickly at a handsome profit. He had four or five hundred dollars cash, and he would part with it readily enough if he was sure each hundred would bring back a thousand or even half of it.

"Pay-um good money for black pearl," Hank agreed, impressively jingling the handful of silver he took from his pocket.

The Indian made no reply, nor did the expression of his countenance change as he stalked out into the sunshine. From outward appearances, the incident was closed, so far as he was concerned. Since he had no black pearls to sell, nor could he buy or gamble for the things he wanted, it was plain to be seen that he could traffic none with the white man.

"Injuns is born gamblers," old Dad Scott began, as he came in the next morning. "I see 'em puttin' up their moccasins an' all sorts of trinkets in a game of three-card monte. One buck seemed to be doin' all the winnin'. They ain't commonly as tricky with each other as white men is, which is how come they don't lose a whole lot in the long run. Just kind of evens up things between 'em."

Hank wasn't interested in Indians and their games. At that moment he was wondering if what he had said about wanting black pearls had ever penetrated the thick skull of Cocopah John. He found out the very next day.

The Indian came in silently, and squatted on his heels in a corner of the room until two other Indians and a white loafer had all taken their departure. He then got up and approached the counter. Taking from beneath his dirty blanket a small packet of folded buckskin, he proceeded to unroll it. Presently he picked from an inner fold a very small, irregular-shaped object. He laid it in the open palm of the white man.

"*Perla negra,*" he said in Spanish.

Hank held the small object close to the light from the single window, and turned it about with his finger. It wasn't truly black, but a dark velvety gray. There was no doubt in his mind that it was a genuine pearl, but his knowledge of such gems was not extensive. He wanted to be sure before he invested much money. He continued to turn it over in his hand, admiring the soft glowing luster of it. He concluded it must be a genuine gray pearl, else the Cocopah would not have brought it to him. The Indian was too dull to substitute anything so much like a pearl. Hank decided he

would not offer as much as the very cheapest pearls were worth.

He laid three dollars and a handful of cheap jewelry on the counter, indicating by a sign that he would give that much for the pearl. He estimated that he would be out no more than five dollars at that, and would certainly stand to make a huge profit on the pearl when he sold it.

The Indian shook his head. "Ten dollar," he said.

Hank added two more dollars to that on the counter and laid out a pair of green earrings. He held up five fingers and pointed to the collection of cheap jewelry, held them up again and indicated the five silver dollars. The Cocopah evidently had no difficulty in understanding what the white man meant to convey, but it was plain that he did not agree with his estimate of the cheap jewelry. Again he shook his head.

"Me go Yuma—get-um ten dollar," he said, holding out his hand for the pearl.

Now it was no part of Hank's plan to let the Indian get out of his shack with that pearl. Least of all did he want him to take it to Yuma, where he might sell it for much more, and get offers for others he might bring. It was with an eye to future business that Hank finally gave in and handed over ten perfectly good dollars. He would give almost that much to know just what a pearl like that was worth. He was sure now that it was a genuine pearl, and he expected to get many more for a fifth or a tenth of their real value.

"Maybe so buy more pearls," he said, as Cocopah John pocketed the money and turned away. The Indian said nothing.

But Hank would buy no more pearls without learning the extent of his bargain in his first venture. When the daily stage for Yuma went out, he was a passenger. He had locked up for the day, sure that he would lose no sales of importance. It lacked several days of pay day. He was eager and a little uneasy, he had taken a chance on the pearl.

At Yuma he found a man who knew something about pearls. He was a dealer in turquoises, garnets, and such precious stones as might be offered for sale in that locality. He assured Hank that he had a genuine gray pearl from Lower California, and readily offered him twenty-five for it. Hank succeeded in boosting the price to thirty dollars, which wasn't so bad for a first deal. He would do better than a mere two-hundred-per-cent profit when he learned a little more about pearls.

"A really good pearl of that size, one that is smooth and without faults, would be worth around a hundred dollars, perhaps more," the dealer explained. "We used to get really good black and gray pearls here from the Gulf Indians, some the size of a pea, worth up in the hundreds. The beggars would sell them at ridiculously low prices, but they're too smart for that now. The dealers go in there these days and buy about everything direct from the divers."

He explained just what a good pearl looked like, and Hank took his departure well pleased at the outcome of his visit. Not only had he proved the soundness of his investment to his entire satisfaction, but he placed a high valuation upon the information he had gleaned.

"Guess if he knew how much I paid that Injun for the pearl, he wouldn't think they'd got so much smarter," he said to himself when he left the dealer.

It was evident to him that only laziness or ignorance or both had prevented the Indian from making the trip to Yuma, where he might have received at least twice as much for the pearl as Hank had given him. He could easily have made the trip in a day, afoot.

Days passed, and Cocopah John did not show up at Greasewood. This pleased old Hank, for he took it to mean that the Indian was off across the line somewhere in search of more pearls. It was no concern of Hank's if the Indian stole the pearls, just so he brought them in and was willing to part with them for a fourth or a fifth of their value. He was determined to drive a little better bargain than he had at first. He knew what constituted a flaw in a pearl now, and he would claim there was a serious flaw in every one that was brought in.

At the end of a week the Indian returned, and his coming was mysterious. He put in his appearance after dark, when Hank's last visitor had taken his departure and he was preparing to close up for the night. Cocopah John slipped in from the darkness without making a sound.

"Shut-um," he said, with a significant nod toward the door.

Hank understood, and he immediately closed and barred the door. He put a piece of burlap over the window, and set his coal oil lamp down on the counter. He rejoiced inwardly at the air of secrecy about the Cocopah, for it indicated to him a prospect of shrewd trading and easy money. The Indian was not long in displaying what he had brought with him.

Old Hank's hand trembled just a little when he held in his palm six pearls, ranging in size from that of a pea down to one similar to the one he had bought from this same Indian a week before. They were all black, and without a visible flaw.

The white man examined them by the lamplight, and so far as he could see there was no imperfection about any one of them. They were almost tear-shaped, remarkably smooth and uniform in shape. He had not expected to find them so nearly perfect. There was the lustrous glow about them that the gray one had possessed, perhaps in a lesser degree on account of the poor light. And the dealer had said that black pearls were very apt to be the more valuable.

Without appearing to do so, the Indian was studying Hank as he fingered the objects, waiting patiently until he had examined every one of them and had placed them in a row on top of the show case. Looking at them all there together, the white man was making a quick estimate of their value. Judging from what the Yuma dealer had told him, he was almost sure the large one would sell for more than three hundred, perhaps a thousand. He expected to buy all six of them for much less than that. It would be a very conservative estimate, indeed, that would place the value of the six under a thousand dollars.

"How much?" Hank asked tentatively, pushing the largest pearl out by itself.

"Sell-um all one," grunted the Cocopah, by which the white man gathered that it was desired to sell all the pearls at a single transaction, something unusual for an Indian.

It suited Hank very well to negotiate for all of them in a lump, but he had no intention of letting the Indian know how much money he had. The fact that the Indian had offered to sell all of them at once confirmed Hank's suspicion that they had been stolen. In that case, he hoped to get them dirt cheap. He puckered his forehead, as if he were undecided whether or not he wished to buy all of them.

"Mebbeso you no can buy-um, mebbeso take-um Yuma," Cocopah John craftily suggested, mistaking the reason for the white man's apparent indecision.

The suggestion had the desired effect, Hank immediately indicated his willingness to buy all the pearls. He didn't ask the Indian his price this time, he

thought it would be better to make an offer. He pushed the pearls all together and held up two fingers.

"Two hundred," he offered by way of a feeler.

However the Indian might have considered the offer, his countenance betrayed nothing of his thoughts. If he was taking the measure of the white man, it was not apparent to Hank. After a few seconds he grunted and held up three fingers.

"T'ree hunder *pesos*," he said.

It was not that Hank wasn't prepared to give three hundred dollars for the lot if he was compelled to, but he took it as a favorable sign when the Indian set a price within a hundred dollars of what he had offered, and made no further mention of taking them to another market. Hank shook his head, but not too positively. He was a good trader, and knew about how far he could go. He also knew the visual power of money with most people, especially the primitive races.

Hank always carried his money in two or three different pockets—a hundred or so in each one. From an inner pocket he now drew a buckskin pouch and shook the contents out upon the counter. From another pocket he took a wallet, and without letting the Indian see all it contained, he took out some silver and currency and laid it alongside the other. He then held up empty palms. He knew, within a few dollars, the sum he had put on the counter. When he counted it he found there two hundred and sixty-eight dollars and some cents. He would have risked no such sum on pearls if he had not already consulted an expert and learned something of their value.

Whatever his method of computation, an Indian usually has a fairly correct sense of money value, in either currency or coin. He is never an easy victim of the short changer. Cocopah John counted the money on the counter, and grunted to indicate that the amount agreed with the white man's statement.

He stood silent for a moment and pointed his finger at the case of cheap ornaments. Hank correctly understood him to mean that the amount of money would be satisfactory, provided some of the jewelry was included. The trade was eventually concluded by the Indian's pocketing the money, tucking a miscellaneous collection of glittering baubles under his blanket, and leaving the six pearls in the white man's possession.

The Indian faded quickly into the night, and when he was gone Hank barred the door after him. He presently put out the light and went to bed. Almost certain now that the Indian had stolen the pearls, he didn't want anybody to suspect that he had them in his possession. He decided that he would take them much farther than Yuma before offering them for sale. If they had been stolen, the news would travel far. He could afford to make a long trip on the profit he expected. He could see no reason why he could not sell them for two thousand dollars, three thousand was not beyond possibility.

Old Hank Foster was so excited over his profitable deal that he did not sleep until after midnight. He lay awake making his plans. In the morning he would be leaving, would turn these valuable pearls into money as quickly as he might safely do so. It was too risky carrying them around with him. He would come back later, perhaps get more black pearls for a song. It wouldn't take an Indian long to gamble away two or three hundred dollars.

Old Dad Scott, the freighter, dropped in while Hank was packing up the next morning.

"Ain't leavin' right with pay day comin' on, are you?" the old freighter queried with a squint of surprise.

"Business callin' me away for a few

days, got to lay in a fresh supply of goods," Hank replied.

Presently the old freighter chuckled. "You know what I was tellin' you about the Cocopahs sellin' black pearls," he began. "Well, I run acrost a Mojave buck the other day had nigh a teacupful of 'em."

Hank's eyes widened, and he stood up from the task of packing his suit case. Perhaps, after all, he was a little hasty in taking his departure, if there were more pearls to be bought. Perhaps he ought to wait.

"Black, they was, an' it would have took an expert to tell they wasn't the gen-u-ine," Dad continued. "This buck is one that's been off to school back East an' got eddicated, then he went back to the blankets an' feathers, like a heap of 'em do. Seems like he ain't forgot none of the white man's tricks he'd learnt, though, an' that mixed in with his nat'ral Injun meanness makes him crookeder than a sidewinder climbin' a sand bank. He sent back East an' got them bogus pearls what was guaranteed to look nat'ral as life an'——"

"You say he was a Mojave?" Hank interrupted, clutching at a straw of hope as a wave of suspicion engulfed him.

"By rights he was, but I figger he'd claim to be a Cocopah or a Yaqui or anything else that would git him anywheres. He's been livin' with the Cocopahs some. I guess you've saw him, big greasy buck that sets off by hisself an' don't say much. I see him come in here two three times, but maybe you wouldn't notice him, bein' as all injuns look a heap alike to a feller that ain't used to 'em. He'd pretend he didn't know much English, but he can talk better'n I can, an' read anything he's a mind to."

Hank Foster couldn't remember having felt quite so sick as he did at that moment. He had never lost as much as five dollars at a time in his life. He slumped down on a box, and in a vague sort of way heard the old freighter through.

"Of course, he couldn't fool a reg'lar joolry man like you, but he worked other Injuns an' some white men, I reckon. Me an' Lige Blake camped one noon right by this Injun's wickiup, an' we see him colorin' these pearls or somethin'. Might be they wasn't right black to begin with, an' I figger maybe he smoked 'em or dyed 'em till they was the right color an' everything. Them that didn't look just right he'd throw away. I picked up some of 'em. Cracked one with a rock an' see it was white inside an' a smoky black that didn't rub off on the outside. Ain't none o' my funeral, I says, if he can make anybody believe they're gen-u-ine. I'd believe it myself, if I didn't know better."

He reached into his pocket and brought out for inspection seven or eight pearls that were faulty counterparts of the ones Hank had paid good money for. There was a broken one that showed a white interior, a surface of velvety black. The Indian had taken a long chance when he let that first genuine pearl go for less than its worth. But the gambler had won on the last throw.

"Injuns is all fools, no trouble to skin 'em blind," Old Hank Foster was wont to say—but that was before he knew Cocopah John.

# Thunder Brakes

## By Cherry Wilson

*Author of "The Lad Who Found Christmas," etc.*

TEXAS RANKIN and Dell Young, en route to Tex's beloved South, are asked by beautiful June Hale to work on the Curly Q while she visits her father, ill in Spokane. They agree. The Curly Q herd is starving. Owing to a feud between the Curly Q and Box Bar for possession of Thunder Brakes, where there is rich grazing, the Hales cannot put their herds there until March first, still three weeks off. Their winter hay has been burned—Box Bar men are suspected.

Curly Q is being run by two old-timers and eleven-year-old Hector Hale, all the men having left. The two cowboys are informed of the state of affairs on their arrival. Both, secretly animated by love of June, take hold valiantly. Dell, experienced cowhand, is appointed ranch foreman.

### CHAPTER V.

### "THAT'S MY JOB!"

NOW that he'd taken the reins, Dell was at a loss how to proceed. His first act was to saddle a horse and make a tour of the Curly Q. Things seemed at an impasse. Riding down to the yards, he critically inspected the herd, huddled in ragged groups, its rough hair blowing up in the pitiless wind. And if it had seemed to him at first sight, a nightmare, a delirium, it was now a hundredfold more so.

A glance at the hay confirmed Calliope's opinion that it would last but a week. And it was three weeks till the first! Where was more coming from? Hale wouldn't have gone to Spokane for feed, if he could have bought it here. He'd mortgaged everything he possessed to raise that cash. And Dell wondered that he'd been able to, for a herd like this was a liability. Hay on Thunder River Range was precious as gold. And, at the prevailing price, every cow would eat her value in a month. At any rate, there was no time to ship now, for the need was immediate, imperative, and his chances to fill it—nil!

But, extending his survey far out on the white range beyond, strangely enough, Dell found hope there. Decision marked his movements and he radiated hope when he stamped into the kitchen, long after night fell.

When the weary crew had finished supper, the new foreman held them at the table and outlined a campaign of war—war not with man, but with nature, inexorable, horrible.

"Boys," Dell said crisply, facing them

on his feet, drawing inspiration from the proud confidence in his partner's eyes, "we can save the herd—or the bulk of it! But it means we've got to put up the fight of our lives. Here's my plan. Pull me up short, if I'm wrong. Then, if any of you can think of a better—shoot!"

Weary, worn-out, as they were, even the old punchers jerked out of their slump, intent on that young face shining down with all the daring, high courage, and vision of youth. Vision that keeps its eyes firmly fixed on the goal, nor sees the obstacles between.

"We've got to get some system to things—organize. First, we'll cut up the herd into three bunches—steers, young cows, an' all of the strongest in one. This will be the main herd, an' I'll handle it. I'll drive it to the range, an' make it rustle—"

"How?" Availing himself of his prerogative, Dutch pulled him up short. "How you figger to make cows rustle their livin' in the snow, Dell?"

"With a scheme I seen worked in the Grand Coulee," Dell enthusiastically outlined. "I knew one nester who pulled his whole herd through with it, in the hard winter of '98. The hills are alive with range horses. I counted more than a hundred on my ride. They're tough, an' you can't kill 'em. We'll round up a bunch, an' hold 'em on the south slopes, where the grass is good under the snow. You-all know how a range horse paws snow—high, wide, an' handsome, eatin' what grass he can get at handy, an' then travelin' on, to double back over the same ground when the sun gits to the pawed-up places an' bares a little more grass. Well, I'm goin' to keep the horses movin' right along, an' let the cows git second pickin's! A few mouthfuls of bunch grass a day will keep life in a cow, an' with the brush an' moss they'll pick up, they'll live three weeks.

"The second bunch"—Dell was creating confidence in his hearers, and it added to his own—"will be made up of cows too weak to buck snow, but able to rough it a bit. I'm turnin' 'em over to you, 'Dutch' and Cal. Hold 'em down in the river bottom an' cut brush an' willow shoots like your life depended on it. They'll live a long time on that—I've seen it tried. You can change their diet an' help out a little by gatherin' an' occasional sled load of moss from them tamarack groves over west of us. Moss ain't much for feed, but it'll help out in a pinch, an' that's sure what we're in."

And now Dell looked at Tex, and there was in his gray eyes, as in Tex's dark ones, looking back, all the strange and unusual affection they held for each other.

"The third lot will be weaklin's, down cows, an' calves. They git what hay's left. By careful feeding, it will hold out for them. That's your job, Tex. It's the hardest, but"—Dell grinned sympathetically—"you'll raise such a steam liftin' them cows, you can't help but keep warm!"

"I'm swappin' with you, pard." Suddenly Tex was on his feet, too. "You take the down cows, I'll range the main herd. That's my job, Dell!"

Caught by the purposeful ring of his voice, Dell looked at him sharply. Tex's face was shadowed by more than the sleepless night, the fatigue of the day. And again Dell knew that lonely sensation of being in the dark, far from Tex, and a stranger to him.

"I—I'd rather not, Tex," he said slowly. "It means spendin' all day in the saddle, an' half the night. I don't mind it a bit, but—you'd freeze doin' it, Tex."

Again, with that haunting inflection, "That's my job!" said Tex, and the hungry longing seen in the depot looked out of his eyes at Dell.

In the end Dell gave in, thinking Tex considered it the dangerous job because of the hostile Box Bar men, but regret-

ting his consent as Tex gave his real reason:

"We've got to use every bit of strength them cows have left. I'll use hosses, like Dell says, to paw for the cattle an' break the trail but—I'm rangin' them cows *straight to Thunder Brakes!* I'll have 'em right on the line, ready to move over the minit that lease takes effect!"

Heck's wild war whoop would have done honor to a Sioux brave. Even the old fellows flamed to his daring. But Dell's heart was heavy.

"Suppose you git the herd out there, an' Hale don't come back by the first," he cried anxiously. "What then, Tex?"

"I'm puttin' the herd on Thunder Brakes the first day of March," answered his partner with quiet force. "whether or not Jeff Hale gits back!"

With one big fight on his hands, Dell couldn't worry too much about that.

And it was a fight—the battle they put up for the Curly Q—one that left scars on the soul of every man engaged in it. A fight with famine, misery, and killing cold. Not once—except at midday—did the temperature rise above zero. Nights, it dropped many degrees below. Warmth, comfort, rest—what were they? The men forgot they ever knew.

But some semblance of order was brought out of chaos. Hope infused the whole outfit. Calliope vowed that even the herd picked up.

Every hour of daylight Thunder River Valley resounded with the sharp ring of axes and Calliope's martial music, as the two old veterans slashed out the young willows and cottonwoods for the bellowing cattle, who had learned to follow the ring of the ax. And, in the toleration of starvation, the cows greedily ate the tender shoots that were last year's growth, even gnawing down tough boughs to the thickness of an inch. As greedily they accepted the tamarack moss hauled in by sled, "while they rested," as Calliope said.

Every hour of daylight, and many of dark, Dell worked with the weaklings, worked desperately to keep them on their feet, and lift to their feet those already down. To enable him to do this alone, he rigged up a set of blocks on a frame and hauled it from place to place. With a careful and scientific hand he doled out the precious remnant of hay. And he worked alone, and to the lonely, monotonous, nerve-racking bawls of the herd.

Out on the frozen range, daily farther from the comforts he craved, daily nearer the west fence of Thunder Brakes that was the dead line, rode Tex. He was mounted on the strongest Curly Q horse, for all day it must wallow belly-deep in snow, as Tex concentrated on the south slopes the great herd of range horses they'd rounded up.

Heartbreaking work—to hold them there, that in their own search for food they might paw up great areas of snow for the bulk of the Curly Q herd trailing after. Heartbreaking work—to keep the herd moving. For the cows, always averse to traveling in snow, would almost have preferred to stand and freeze. But Tex made them rustle.

Ravenously, they cleaned up every spear of grass, every leafless whip of vine maple, every vestige of buckbrush in their path, eating a black, broad trail, leading back to the Curly Q Ranch. And ahead—over the unbroken white ridges —Thunder Brakes!

So two weeks passed, and no word from Hale. Ominous quiet on the part of the Box Bar. Lying in his bunk beside Tex, too tired to sleep, his body one throb, one ache, Dell wondered why men worked like that. He knew why *he* did. But why did the rest? Not for money—there wasn't enough in the world to pay for it! Not for Jeff Hale either!

"Wonder what kind of a hombre our boss is," he said aloud, on the chance that Tex was awake. "Readin' between

the lines that Dutch an' Cal let drop, he ain't no saint, Tex. He fenced Cayuse Springs against Kinney, an', from what I catch, that started the fuss."

"He's far from a saint," Tex's vehemence startled Dell. "You can bet your bottom dollar he deserves all he's gittin'! But we ain't killin' ourselves for Jeff Hale. We're fightin' for June—an' she's worth the best fight of any man's life!"

Again that sharp pang tore through Dell Young, and he had to hold hard to Tex's promise that—surer than any sure thing in the world—June wasn't the rock on which they'd split.

To Dell, the memory of June did not grow dim. It grew, instead, into a composite picture of all that was lovely, good, and true. He had only to shut his eyes to see her—as vivid, as glorious—still appealing to him. He even remembered the tiny dimple at the corner of her mouth. It must deepen, he thought, when she smiled. He longed, unaccountably, to see June Hale smile.

It didn't seem strange that he'd loved her on sight. Love came to some men sudden, like that. He had a bunkie once who fell in love with a picture. And he'd heard of a man who went plumb loco over a statue he'd made himself. He had more reason than any of them. For when a hombre went along all his life, building up a picture of a girl—of all the things he loved in a girl—and along came that girl, *his* girl to the very last detail, it didn't take time to love her, for he already did!

And here in her home, working for her, with something at every turn to remind him of her, with stories of her constantly on the old punchers' tongues, he grew to know her, as he would have been long knowing her had she been there.

Drearily the wind might moan and the cold bite deep. June was in his heart. And his heart marked time till she came home.

They all marked time—until March first! Then would come the grand battle, short and sweet, for, whatever its outcome, there would be for the Curly Q punchers thereafter, rest—rest——

"Two weeks," grimly Tex tolled off one night, "an' then—the *fireworks!*"

## CHAPTER VI.

### JEFF HALE RETURNS.

THAT winter! It made cold history in the great Northwest. It was a winter of tremendous loss, when the cattle industry of the Okanogan ranges was crippled, and the sacrifices men made to save their property were almost past belief. A winter when the poor nester, with but one cow or two, fed them even the straw from the tick he slept on; when the big cattleman, unprepared for the unusual severity of it, saw his riches swept away, and himself placed on a par with the nester; when thousands upon thousands of cattle died on the range, and the green grass of a spring that had come too late to save them sprang up to sunshine through their bleaching skulls. That winter the song of the coyote was never stilled, and was hideous even to those who had loved it, for the high note of exultance which marked it the feasting song.

Every heart prayed for an early chinook—that dry, warm wind which comes out of the south, and takes the snow as if by magic. Every eye watched the southern skies for the black clouds that presaged it, watched the weighted evergreens on the north slopes that would slip their burden and spring erect at the first breath of it, filling all the air with the curious little rushing sound they made—the mellow, musical voice of the spring chinook.

All along the valley, winter-weary Indians made medicine to hasten its coming, and wore themselves out in the frenzied gyrations of the chinook dance.

But it would come too late to save

the Curly Q. And the reinforced crew battled on like demons, heroes—*men!*

Day after day, Tex was up before dawn and out in sub-zero weather, toiling at work that would have broken the spirit of most men. All day in the saddle, blue to the lips with cold, cussing, shivering, pulling cows out of the drifts with a frozen rope, forcing them, inch by inch, against their will, nearer the disputed land.

His job! Why? Why of all men should Tex Rankin, whose blood was tempered to southern climes, choose it, fiercely insist upon it, suffer the tortures of the damned to do it?

None dreamed the agonies he suffered—none but Dell. And pride of him leaped high in Dell.

"You're a good soldier, Tex, he said huskily, riding out there one bitter blue-gray day. "You couldn't put up a gamer fight if them cows was your own!"

Tex looked at him out of eyes dark-ringed, in a sunken face.

"If them was my cows," he gritted, "I'd let 'em die peaceful! I'd curl up my toes an' lay down in a drift along with them!"

Then why was he doing it? For June, he'd said!

"They say freezin's a easy death, Dell," Tex half moaned. "But they're far from the truth."

Suddenly Dell was alarmed. Tex looked sick. "If it gits too bad, Tex, you can quit."

"I ain't a quitter," Tex said sullenly, "I'm the world's prize—fool!"

Not until long, long after did Dell understand the bitter self-mockery in that cry, but it rang in his ears as he ran his eye over the herd, scattered about in the cold sunshine. The animals were losing flesh rapidly, and it was a week till the first. Gravely, he turned back to his partner.

"Think they can hold out, Tex?"

Tex's jaw set at a stubborn angle. "They've *got* to! I ain't goin' through this an' be licked in the end!"

In deepening alarm, Dell said earnestly, "Listen, Tex. We ain't heard a word from Hale. Till we do, we'd better stay on our side of the high board fence. We ain't no right to——" His partner's gesture of sharp impatience cut him short.

"Oh, well," Dell put the best face on it he could, "mebbe I'm makin' a mountain out of a molehill. We ain't seen hide or hair of the Box Bar outfit since we come. Likely Kinney's threat was all blah!"

Tex smiled dryly. "You got another guess comin'," he said, swinging his horse about. "Follow my smoke, an' I'll show you, Dell!"

Wonderingly, Dell followed Tex up the long, forested slope ahead to a high summit, where Tex stopped and, turning in the saddle, threw a long arm out toward the flats far below.

"Dell, that's Thunder Brakes!"

His blood quickening, his eyes lighting with interest, Dell looked down at the series of steplike mesas, terracing up from Little Klootch Creek to a wild jumble of canyons and mountains, black, jagged chasms and cloud-piercing buttes. A fine place for an outlaw to play hide-and-seek in, Dell couldn't help thinking, if he had the law on his trail.

But the windswept flats were what held his interest. Treeless, they were, and free from snow, showing tawny in sharp contrast to the dead white that bound them on every side. And the tawny was bunch grass, thick and rank, with here and there, in sinklike depressions, patches of deeper brown, denoting where the rye grass grew, "acre wide and man high." Thunder Brakes—the promised land for the Curly Q herd!

"What do you see, Dell?" Tex asked impatiently. "No, down here, at the foot of this hill!"

What did Dell see? The west fence of Thunder Brakes, dead white on the

outside, where the hill protected it from the scouring wind, but brown on the other—on the other, dark riders! Rush Kinney's men on fence patrol!

"The ol' buzzard's watchin'!" Tex said grimly. "Every day since I started the herd, a rider on a black hoss has popped up on the sky line to chalk off my distance!"

"'Bat' Rouge!" Dell's eyes swung to Tex, dark with emotion. "Remember, Tex, that night in Blue Buttes—he was ridin' a black!"

Tex nodded. "Dell, does it look like a fight?"

"But we——" Dell began helplessly.

But Tex cut in, "Pard, there's a hot time comin', but it's *my* fight, savvy? With you to help me, I'll see it through!"

Cruelly depressed, Dell rode back to the Curly Q. Why did Tex exclude him like that? Hadn't he fought as hard as Tex? Wasn't it his fight, too? Hadn't he as much right as Tex to fight for June?

Turning his horse up Thunder River to speak to the old punchers, Calliope's voice came to meet him, lifted in tired but dauntless song:

> "Ha! Ha! Ha! You an' me,
> Li'le brown jug, don't I love thee!
> Ha! Ha! Ha!——"

*"Har! Har! Har!"* sarcastically roared Dutch. *"Can't* you be still? Cal, you got my nerves plumb rasped raw! Talk, if you got any strength to waste on your jaw, but for the love of gooseberry marmalade, don't *sing!"*

And, as Dell imagined, in an effort to turn Calliope's vocal activities into pleasanter channels, he added, "Why dja reckon June don't write?"

"Dunno," Cal answered, peeved.

"Think Jeff's hurt bad?"

"No news is good news, but I hope to Heaven he's hurt so bad he don't git over it afore spring!"

Unconsciously, as Dutch dittoed that, Dell reined in his horse.

"Them boys is the best danged waddies I ever seen—bar none!" Cal declared fervently. "But when Jeff comes, they go! Won't make any difference to *him,* what they've done, what he owes 'em. They'll go jist the same."

"Cal," Dutch was much too engrossed to see Dell approaching, "did it ever strike you that Jeff's a mite off?"

"He sure is on *that* subject! I've often figgered he musta had something to make him—some big trouble that preyed on his mind."

"It's a cinch he brung it on hisself, if he did!" Dutch said warmly. "An' he's a-hatchin' hisself another batch of the same! For, Cal, he's sure takin' the wrong tack with June! Spirits is natural in a young thing. You can't keep 'em bottled. Leastwise, Cal, you can't keep 'em corked. They jist fizzle an' foam, till all of a sudden off pops the lid! That li'le gal's been an angel to Jeff, but——" His jaws closed like a trap, as Dell coughed warningly.

But Dell had something else to worry him now. What particular treatment of June by her father did the old men resent? What mysterious connection did it have with his and Tex's staying on? He knew now how desperately he wanted to stay, to save the herd for June, to be the kind of a man she took him for, and keep things together for her, somehow.

He couldn't part with Dutch or Calliope, either. They were princes to work with; never whimpered; took their turns in the kitchen. Heck, too! Why, he most ran his legs off on errands and chores. He liked Heck a lot, even if the kid didn't like him.

Heck didn't put salt in his coffee, or tacks in his boots, or set the mousetrap to catch his toes when he rolled from his bunk. He didn't even pay him the compliment of "cussing him out," as he did Dutch and Calliope when they dis-

pleased him. He just ignored him when he could and was polite when he couldn't. And Dell was sorry for this.

Chancing to run across him down in the bottom, stacking dead limbs for the heater "to warm Tex up," Dell asked him outright:

"Heck, what you got against me?"

The boy flushed, and dug his toe in the snow. Then, looking up at Dell, came out with it manfully:

"You're *his* pal!"

Jealous of Tex! A wave of pity swept over Dell. "Why can't we all three be pals?" he suggested.

Hector considered that for a moment. "A hombre can't pal with *two,*" he said candidly. "An' I like Tex best."

For which Dell didn't blame him any.

"Never knowed him to take a shine like that to but one man before," Cal told Dell as, together, they watched the boy riding off to the range with hot coffee for Tex. "That was Mojave, who worked here about two years ago. Come to think of it, he was a heap like your pard. Deep, I mean, an' devil-may-care. But folks said Mojave was a bad actor before he come here."

"Where is he now?"

"Workin' for the Box Bar, dang him!"

If they had trouble then, Dell thought pityingly, it was going to make it tragic for Heck—fighting a pal.

He liked to watch Tex and the boy together. Sometimes of an evening, when the big fellow was safe inside and for the moment the day's trials crowded out, he'd hear the boy describing to Tex, to the last gory detail, the battle to come. Always the Curly Q was victorious. Always he concluded with Bat Rouge squirming under his hero's heel.

"Gee!" he'd cry rapturously, "I can't wait, Tex, to see you an' Bat mix." And it was the disappointment of his young life that when Tex and Bat Rouge fought their epochal battle at the lonely dugout on Thunder Brakes, he wasn't there to see.

Often, Dell would hear Tex telling the boy stories of Texas, especially the stirring tale of the Alamo. Over and over, Hector must hear it. He never tired of it. And he learned to swear by Sam Houston, too. And, sometimes, when Tex was most discouraged, most used up by cold and fatigue, the boy's clear voice would rise in the old battle cry of the Texans:

*"Remember the Alamo!"*

It never failed to rouse Tex, and to the boy he poured out his homesick yearning, now all but unbearable. He pictured to him the hot plains of Texas, where lizards and snakes "skally-hooted" everywhere. The "forests" of prickly pear on the Neuces, in which many a rider, lost, had been crucified on the cruel spines they bore. And the boy's eyes would glisten.

"I'm goin' there, Tex!" Dell heard him announce one night. "I'll go back with you."

"When you grow up, Heck," qualified Tex in his slow drawl, "an' your dad gives you leave."

"He won't ever let me!" flashed the boy bitterly. "He never lets me have any fun. But I'll go anyhow—I'll run off an' go! You'll take me, Tex?"

"You'd leave June?"

The boy's face fell at the implied reproach, then cleared at a simple decision. "We'll take June! It's a go, Tex!"

Dell seemed to smother all at once, and walked out into the night. Stars studded the sky like diamonds, shedding their million facets of light. The cows lowed hunger. A coyote howled to the frozen moon. Somewhere, out there, dying by inches, was the main bulk of the Curly Q herd. Somewhere, out there, men guarded the range that would save it. And, here—Tex and he—where were they drifting?

Next day, a neighboring rancher, re-

turning from Blue Buttes, delivered a letter from June. She was bringing her father home on the noon train and wanted the sled sent to meet them. Calliope, who could best be spared at the time, went in.

Just before dusk Dell heard them coming. Forgetting everything but June's home-coming, he released the calf he was tending and straightened to look. Eagerly his eyes leaped over old Cal on the front seat, over the bundled form of a man in the rear, to the little blue-cloaked figure beside him. Eagerly, his lips and eyes smiled in certain expectancy of some greeting. But no one even looked toward him. And with dozens of bawling cows around him—was his not unreasonable thought—he was a mighty hard person to overlook.

Anxiously his eyes pierced the distance to June. Her face was set straight ahead, white and unhappy. A strange chill, strange dread, fell upon Dell. When Hale come, they'd go, every one said! But he couldn't believe it. His spirits refused to be damped. He'd see June at supper. He counted the moments till then.

But long before then, Calliope rode off to the range, returning in an hour or so with Tex.

"Dell," the old puncher was the picture of woe, "I wisht I was a hundred miles from this ranch! But I ain't—an' he's made me the goat!" He looked long at the stricken cowboy, with wet, old eyes, then tragically blurted, "The boss wants to see you!"

Dell forced a smile to his lips. "It's natural he'd want to," he said, but his lightness was forced.

"It's a howlin' crime!" vowed Cal.

Walking with Tex to the house, Dell was too upset to pay any heed to his partner. But, at the door, the big puncher stayed his hand on the knob with a cry, so hoarse, so strained, that he'd never in the world have known it was Tex's voice:

"*Wait*, pard! *Wait*—till I git a grip on myself!"

And now Dell saw that Tex was shaking like a leaf and white to the lips. But whatever emotion possessed him, it passed in a moment, and he was again his still, cool self.

Then they went in.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE PLEDGE.

THEY passed through the kitchen without seeing any one, but when they would have entered the living room, Heck burst out of it, flung himself upon Tex, and clung to him, sobbing as though he would never let go. And while his partner strove to quiet the boy, Dell, chilled by this portent, walked into the room.

June was standing by the table, under the light of the chandelier. No snow, now, on her blue dress, bright curls, or long lashes. But there was snow in her cheeks, and she seemed frozen there. She was still the girl of the storm.

Jeff Hale, half sat, half reclined, in the deep Morris chair. His position, alone, indicated his hurt. Nor did he change it, save to nod briefly as Dell came in.

He was tall—tall as Tex, Dell imagined—and a man you had only to see once never to forget. For his hair was snow-white, sweeping back from a brow high and white, though the rest of his narrow, long face was bronzed. His deep-set eyes were the blackest, most piercing Dell had ever seen in the head of a man. He had a thin, high-bridged nose. His lips, too, were thin, and saturnine in expression, the true index to his character. "Hard as nails!" was Dell's swift summing of him, as Tex came in, leading the still sobbing boy by the hand.

"Boys," Jeff Hale's impersonal stare held them both, and his voice was as

hard as Dell's first impression of him, "I'm thankin' you for what you've done for the Curly Q, an' I'm askin' you to take this money in payment an' get out!"

Many predictions had not prepared Dell for this flat dismissal. Amazed, he looked up from the bills in Hale's long fingers into his deep, inscrutable eyes. But Dell wasn't seeing Hale. He was seeing Tex—out there on the range, blue to the lips, suffering, game! In payment—*that?* For what Tex had done! Dell's blood boiled.

"Got any reason?" his voice rang loud on the dead hush of the room.

"If I have," Hale said coldly, "it's my own."

"If you have," Dell cried hotly, "be man enough to kick through with it! We've worked like dogs here. We've got a right to know why we're treated like dogs. Why, man, you can't let us go! Think of the fix you'd be in—the fix you *are* in!"

"That's my business, too!" Hale flared wrathily. "Git off the place—pronto! I've fired you both!"

It was Jeff Hale's ranch. So, as far as Dell was concerned, that settled the matter. With a last look at the pale little ghost that was June, he was turning to go, when Tex thrust the boy from him, and walked right up to Hale.

"It's no go!" Tex said coldly, his haggard face set. "When we met your girl at the depot an' heard the shape things was in, we ditched our own plans to help her out. We couldn't stand by an' see her ruined. An' we sure won't now, when we can catch a glimmer of daylight ahead. We've worked like dogs, as my pard says, but we won't take our time an' pull out like whipped pups! Not on your daguerreotype! You didn't hire us, Hale, an' you can't fire us!"

The sheer nerve of that speech stunned all but Hale. He jerked up in his chair, seemed on the point of violent outburst, when he got a grip on himself, even relaxed, as if he found something to his liking in this.

"If you'd rather take your dismissal from her," he said, with slow insolence, "I'm agreeable." And, with the air of one certain of obedience here, he commanded the girl:

"Fire them, June!"

To his utter amazement, she defied him.

"I won't!" and her eyes weren't blue, but black, in her mutiny. "Dad, you can't make me! It means losing everything. They were good enough to come when we most needed them. We need them no less now. I won't tell them to go! I'm thanking them with my whole heart for even wanting to stay!"

Brave in her first rebellion, she faced his wrath with unflinching eyes. He turned from her in a passion.

"Git out!" he roared at the cowboys. "Oh, I'll show you who's boss of this ranch!"

"That's easy to see!" drawled Tex, his insolence a dead match for Hale's, and before which the rancher was helpless to do more than sputter and fume. "Sure, you rule the roost! You're the big 'I-am!' That ain't all you are, Jeff Hale—you're selfish as sin! You're sinkin' fast, an' you don't give two whoops who you drag down with you!"

That this was a queer way to go about getting a job wasn't what startled Dell. It was another, more startling, change in Tex. He'd thought he knew Tex pretty well, but he didn't know him at all. When Tex got mad, he got cold. He wasn't cold *now,* and he sure was mad!

"Who suffers most, if you lose this ranch?" he blazed down at Hale. You? Not on your life! You've lived your life, an' you ain't made a splash in a hog wallow! You don't care that this boy an' girl, here, who can't help it, if you're their dad, lose *their* start in life! You don't give a tinker's dang! You're mortgaged to the hilt. If you lose your

herd, they lose their home! There's a chance—a slim one—of pullin' out now, if we stay on. But for some fool reason that won't bear mentionin' you'd fire us an' kill their chance! You'd beggar this girl——"

Dell thought Jeff Hale would have a fit and fall in it then.

"June," he panted, his eyes rolling wildly, *"git me a gun!"*

She gave no sign of hearing, and helplessly Hale sank back, grinding in baffled fury:

"You're mighty concerned about *her!"*

"Somebody has to be," retorted the Texan, "if her own father ain't!" That speech seemed to loose a devil in Tex, for his throat set up a visible throbbing, and he appeared to tower a mile above Hale.

*"Father?"* he mocked, and not even Dell guessed how wildly his heart beat then, or the pang that tore quiveringly through his breast. "What kind of a father are you? Even an animal looks out for its young—fights for it—gives it the best it can provide! But you——"

June's hands went protestingly out to Tex, but he gave her no heed.

"You're the kind of a father that would walk out on a kid, an' not be concerned if it died or lived——"

*"Don't!"* Hale's face was bloodless, and he cowered from Tex.

"Why not?" relentlessly Tex mocked him. "Why not hear the truth for once? You're the kind of a father that could tear a kid from its moth——"

*"For mercy's sake!"* prayed Hale, his voice rising in a scream. Wildly he looked about, as though for some way of escape. Then his eyes fell on his daughter.

"June," he whispered thickly, "leave the room!"

Wordlessly, she obeyed him. Forgotten by all, Hector slipped behind Tex. A painful silence fell over all. In it, Jeff Hale slowly fought back to composure, all the while staring at Tex like a man hypnotized. As if he'd been beaten, Dell thought, for the first time in his life, and had a holy fear and respect for the man who had done it! But there was more in his look—guilt? Remorse? Dell couldn't decide. As for Tex—the last ounce of fight had gone out of him.

"Why do you want this job?" Hale demanded suspiciously at last. "Most men would shy a mile off from it. What makes you so crazy to work for me?"

"To finish what I've started," Tex said simply, "to save the Curly Q herd."

A breathless moment, in which Hale seemed weighing his words, weighed them, and arrived at some hard decision.

"Young man," he told Tex, more calmly than he'd spoken yet, "you've said things to me to-night I never thought a man could say—an' live! More than *you'd* have said, if I hadn't been helpless. But your words go deeper than you know—though some of 'em are beyond me. And, for fear other folks think as you do—that I'm unmindful of June an' the boy—I'll keep you till spring—*on one condition!"* Again he embraced both in his terrible scrutiny.

"Which?" asked Tex, in wilted tone.

"That you'll give me your word of honor," hoarsely stipulated Jeff Hale, "to speak no word of love to my daughter!"

Both cowboys were outraged.

"You—you'd even insult *her!"* Tex blazed up again.

The rancher lifted his hand.

"I don't mean it like that. Nor I ain't explainin' to you what I do mean—more than this: I've lost a lot in my lifetime. June's all I got left. She's mine, an' I'm goin' to keep her. I'd rather see her dead, than married to the best man on earth. An' I'll see the man dead, before he gits her! If you're honest in wantin' the job——"

"I'll meet that condition," Tex silenced him. "I give you my word!"

"An' you?" Hale's piercing eyes were bent upon Dell.

Dell's heart beat madly. Not to speak love to June! Could he promise that? But he had no choice. To refuse meant to leave her forever. If he agreed, he'd be with her till spring.

"I swear!" he solemnly promised.

"All right!" Hale breathed freer then. "But I'm warnin' you both, it won't be healthy to go back on that pledge. You're here to work. You go when the herd's pulled through. That's understood! An' I want you to savvy this, too. What I say, I mean; an' what I say, goes! I won't be argued with. An' I'll never take ag'in what I took to-night! Now, let's git down to cases."

Dell didn't enter much into the discussion that followed. He was finding out what sort of a hombre Hale was at last, and was dazed by his finding. Calliope had told Hale just what they had done and he approved of it, grudgingly. Though he came mighty near praising Tex, when told that the main herd was within two miles of Thunder Brakes.

"Then you're goin' on?" Tex asked eagerly.

"I am!" Hale's jaw set like a rock. "I've got a lease on that place, an' I'd like to see Rush Kinney stop me! The Box Bar's three to our one, but right is might!"

Seeing that the interview was nearing an end, Dell reminded him, "You ain't told us yet how you got hurt."

That threw Hale into a fury again. "Some coward slugged, manhandled, an' robbed me!" he raged. "Waylaid me in the dark, on my way to the hotel. When I woke up in the hospital, I found I'd been robbed of every cent I'd rustled in the hope of buyin' hay!"

"Think the Box Bar was back of it?" queried Tex tensely.

And they were taken aback by the positiveness with which Hale denied the suspicion. "No, that's *one* thing they ain't guilty of! It was a sailor."

Astounded by that, they both besieged him. How did he know that? Spokane wasn't a seaport! What would a sailor be doing four hundred miles from a boat? Bat Rouge had taken a train ride about that time. They could find out where, if Hale said so. Might it not have been Bat? Did he see his assailant?

"No! It was dark, I told you," Hale said stubbornly. "But it wasn't Bat—it was a sailor."

He gave no reason for that strange and groundless belief. And, later, coming to know him further, they'd have known better than to expect him to. For, as Calliope said, "If Jeff gits a thing in his head, all creation can't pry it out with a pickax. Jeff's one part pure cussedness, an' three parts mule. We shipped a boatload of steers once, down the Okanogan to Portland, an' Jeff had a run-in with the deck hands over the loadin'. Ever since then, a man couldn't pull off a crime on the Great Sahara but he'd swear it was a sailor!"

Still sticking to that belief now, Hale instructed them:

"Go on as you're doin'. Crowd the cows right up to Thunder Brakes! Kinney won't dare bother them on government range, an' we'll all be on hand to put them there on Monday!"

Jubilant at the way things had turned out, the boys were hurrying through the kitchen to stun old Cal and Dutch with the news, when June came running to meet them.

"Good-by!" she cried, tears in her eyes and voice. "Please believe there's one Hale that's grateful."

"Good-by?" echoed Tex gently. "Girl, you're always sayin' good-by. But you ain't rid of us by a long shot. We're goin' to stay!"

She stared at him blankly, unable to believe.

smiled deep into her tear-starred eyes.

"That's on the level, June," Tex

"How——" She was tremulous with wonder and joy. "Whatever did you say to dad that he let you stay?"

"Oh, Jiminy, what didn't he say!" whooped Heck, all doubled up in a spasm of glee. "He said—he *wouldn't make love to you!*"

The girl's distress was painful to Dell, though he'd never seen anything half so pretty as June was then—all colored up pink.

"Dad can't know how he humiliates me," loyally she made excuse for Hale. "He—he wouldn't do that, if he did. I don't care—for myself. But I hate it for you. It—it's ridiculous! As if a man couldn't come on the place without wanting to make love to me!"

A far from ridiculous supposition, Dell thought. Then he was pink and panicky, too, as Heck from a safe distance made everything definite.

"Sis, Dell promised, too!"

Flaming many shades pinker, June ran from the room.

"You young limb of Satan!" Dell made a wild grab for the boy, but Heck slipped through his hands like an eel and ran to Tex for protection. Not that Tex was able to give him any, for he was helpless with laughter himself.

Such was the price Dell Young and his partner, Tex Rankin, paid for their jobs on the Curly Q. Not to love June? No! Not to *speak* love! To that they were pledged. But no pledge ever invented by man can be laid upon eyes, and eyes speak love as truly as lips, and volumes may be put in a glance. But could romance possibly blossom in such an atmosphere of misery, cold, and strife? It could—and be the more deeply rooted, more exquisitely hued for its cruel struggle for life.

The cold, toilsome days passed like a nightmare. Each took more out of the crew than sleep could restore. Often the partners fell into their bunks too weary to do more in the way of undressing than pull off their boots. Each day found the crisis by that day nearer. And the Curly Q herd was in sight of the promised land!

Down by the river, the two old punchers faithfully slaughtered the brush. Calliope still sang as he worked, but the text of his song was as sad as his faint and quavery tone:

"The stream's a-runnin' jist the same,
The willers on each side,
Are bendin' o'er the grave of Rosie Lee——"

Such was the tenor of his songs now. Sometimes he'd entreat the world in general to "Toll the bell for I'ile Nell," or, more appropriately, to, "Play the fife slowly, an' beat the drum lowly, an' play the dead march," as they bore him along. And he dragged each of these pitiful wails out to the bitter end. For Dutch was much too fagged to protest.

"Reckon nothin' will ever surprise me ag'in," Cal vowed once in a short breathing spell, "after Jeff keepin' the boys on!"

"Nor me!" Dutch agreed.

Calliope dug deep in his pocket. "Toss you two-bits, Dutch, to see which June picks."

"It ain't worth the effort," Dutch sighed, leaning hard on his ax. "She could shut her eyes, an' pick. Either one, she'd git a *man!*"

After another back-breaking siege, he asked Cal what day it was. The days had run right into each other till he'd lost all track of time.

"February 26th," Cal said promptly. "Three days more, an' we'll swap these axes for guns!"

They whacked away another while in silence.

"Dutch," Cal said solemnly, "them Lone Star waddies sure believe in bein' prepared. Tex never leaves the bunk house without lookin' over his big six-gun. An' this mornin' I saw him dig out that ol' saddle scabbard an' take along the .30-30!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### LIGHTER MOMENTS.

STEADILY the ominous date crept up. How ominous, Tex could realize best. For he was working now in sight of the Box Bar men. And he had almost hourly evidence of Rush Kinney's determination to prevent Jeff Hale from making the one move that could forestall ruin.

The men at the Curly Q looked forward to March first as to a release. For, once Thunder Brakes was open to them, Dutch and Cal would be liberated from the slavish slashing down there and, having driven the cows in their care slowly over the trail beaten by the main herd, be free to help Dell. For Dell's lot couldn't be moved. On the short rations to which he'd been forced to reduce them, they had not even been able to hold their own. He hated to think how many they'd already dragged over the hill. The hay was practically gone, but they planned to cut rye grass on Thunder Brakes and haul it down to them.

Nothing was said of the coming fight for possession of Thunder Brakes. Just how Hale meant to wrest it from the Box Bar—well-manned, fresh, and as determined to keep him off as he was to go on—his crew were naturally anxious to know. But he didn't divulge his plans, and they all knew better than to ask, or make any suggestions. He was still too weak to get outside, and they rarely saw him except at meals.

"I'm worried about him," June confided to Dell at the feed yards one day. "He acts so queer—not a bit like himself. He just sits for hours and stares into space; and to-day I ran across him up in the attic. He'd got mother's picture out of the trunk and was crying over it. He never would look at that picture before—or even let me look at it."

"Your mother's dead?" Dell had heard that, but he wanted to keep her talking to him.

"She died when I was little——" As if, Dell thought grinning, she was ever anything else! "I don't remember her much. Dad won't talk of her, won't talk of his life before he came here. We came from Texas—that's all I know, and I've quit asking him about mother. He loved her so much he can't bear to hear her mentioned, I guess. Hector's my half brother. Dad married again. My second mother died after we came here."

Dell was seeing a lot of June these days. Spring calves were coming, and, due to the mothers' weakened condition, they had to have exceptional care. With the crew overworked as it was, this task fell on June and the boy. They had a nursery out in the barn, to which Tex brought in often, across his saddle, a bawling, long-legged little addition.

Naturally Dell, working right handy there, was often called in to help June with an obstreperous calf that just wouldn't keep its feet out of the bucket, and they'd laugh at its antics. Naturally, too, their hands often met in the plain course of duty, and Dell couldn't help tingling clear to his toes, pledge or no pledge. Once, when June's hands were so cold the pain made her half sick, Dell told her nothing took the frost out so quick as to run them through somebody's hair. And it was easier for him to take his hat off than for her, so he did, and she did, standing so close to him to do it that her blue eyes laughed right into his. And she said she liked straight, dark hair like his, and he said he didn't. He liked short, brown curls all crowded down by a red tam-o'-shanter, and all pushed up by the big collar of a fuzzy red sweater. And then they both laughed, and her hands *did* get warm.

Sometimes, of course, she had to work in the house. But it never was long till he went in, too. And there she'd be, pouring his coffee, or flitting around with a hot dish in her hand. No matter

how tired or busy he was—and he sure was plenty of both—it was no trouble to fetch her a bucket of water, or split up some wood. And Dell didn't give two shucks when he heard Heck telling Tex that he was a "mush!"

He could hardly wait until spring. Then he and Tex would be fired, and released from that pledge. Then he could tell June just how he felt. But it was more wintry than ever—like all the cold since last fall had piled up until now.

And so Dell and June—without soldiering any, either of them—had long talks of her life on the ranch. Reading between the lines again, Dell got mad as a hornet at how her father had tried to bottle young spirits, which even old Calliope knew couldn't be done. It wasn't in any wave of self-pity that June told him either, but just to talk to somebody young enough to get her viewpoint. Something she hadn't had much chance of doing before. For Jeff Hale had been "awfully" strict with her since she was grown, wouldn't even let her have any girl friends. But all her kid days, Janice Kinney and she had been great chums.

"Any relation to the Box Bar Kinney?" Dell asked.

"His daughter." June couldn't imagine why Dell looked so dumb.

"I can't feature him bein' a daddy!" the cowboy confessed. "Somehow, I got him pictured a bloodcurdlin' big ogre who eats little girls!"

They both laughed again.

"He's not!" June was honestly sweet, and sweetly honest. "You'd likely think him a nice old man. I always thought so till he burned our hay. And"—her eyes were suddenly wistful—"I still think Janice is the nicest girl on this range."

Of course Dell took exception to that.

"Oh, wait till you see her!" June blushed a little. "She's pretty, and as good as she's pretty. Full of the dickens, too! We had lots of fun. But I haven't seen her to speak to for three years now. Dell, there's a reason! The last time she came over—Bat was working here then——"

"Bat worked here—on the Curly Q?" Dell couldn't credit his ears.

"Why, didn't you know that? He was our foreman. He was—" Dell was entranced by that girlish giggle—"he was the last man under sixty that dad ever hired!"

"Then *that's* why every one said we'd go"—Dell saw the light at last—"because we were young!"

She nodded. "You see, dad's so settled and serious he don't like young folks around, or me to go with young folks—or have young times."

Settled and serious, *nothing!* was Dell's savage thought. Selfish and mean was what he was! Had been married twice himself, the old sinner, and wouldn't leave June even get married once!

"But to go on with my story of why Janice quit coming. Bat, he—took a fancy to me, and I—well, I thought he was pretty nice, too. You see," she put in by way of apology, "I wasn't but sixteen then, and had no very high ideals of men.

"Well, Janice came over one night, and wanted me to go to the big dance the stockmen were giving up at the schoolhouse. Bat offered to take us. But dad's dead set against dancing, so I knew it would be useless to ask. Heavens, how I wanted to go! I've never wanted anything half so bad in my life. I'd learned to dance to a phonograph over at Janice's, and I was crazy about it—still am, for that matter! Besides, I had a new dress—a ruffly white muslin, with a pink-ribbon sash. And all the time Janice kept talking, I kept seeing myself in *that* dress at *that* dance, till—guess what I did?"

Dell couldn't guess.

"Sneaked out, like a thief in the night,

as the books say, and went with Janice and Bat. Wasn't that awful?"

"Perfectly terrible!" Dell was properly shocked.

She made an impudent face at him which, had no pledge existed, he'd surely have kissed. "Well," she sighed deeply, "it wasn't half as terrible as what came of it. For dad followed me there! I was the life of the party, if I do say so—and please let me say so," she pleaded pathetically, "for it was my first and last dance!"

No—not her last dance. But June couldn't know that.

"I was dancing with Bat when dad came in. Oh, Dell, I could die of shame when I think of it! He jerked me right off the floor, then read the riot act to the crowd. Told them dancing was 'the devil's amusement,' called it 'hugging to music,' and things like that. He'd have killed Bat but for the men grabbing his gun. He called him down something awful and fired him. Then he started on Janice. Called her a 'minx' and a 'hussy,' and forbade her even to speak to me!"

"That's what started the fuss then?" Dell said slowly. "Cal told us it was a difference of opinion on what made up human sin."

The little tam-o'-shanter nodded agreement.

"Rush Kinney thinks as much of his daughter as dad does of me. So he waltzed right over here and told dad to start apologizing and to apologize hard! Dad was too stubborn, and anyhow he thought he was right. They quarreled, and since then it's been awful. Somebody stampeded our cattle. Dad blamed Kinney. We *know* Bat had a hand in it. He went to work for the Box Bar when dad fired him. Then dad fenced in Cayuse Springs to get even, and Kinney swore he'd run dad out of the country. He's just about doing it, too!"

He was a long way from doing it, Dell said firmly, but he thought it would serve Hale right if he did. A man ought to be shot for corralling a girl like June. She didn't kick either. The most she would own was that it was lonesome—at times.

"Does Bat—fancy you still?" He asked the question that all this while had burned in his mind.

"Far from it!" The little dimple northwest of June's mouth deepened and danced. "I came to my senses right after the dance. Bat wanted me to meet him without dad's knowing it, and I added my opinion of him to dad's! You see, it was only a kid fancy with me. But, talk about the fury of a *woman* scorned! A woman wouldn't be in it with Bat. He's hated me like poison ever since. Now, he's wild about Janice. He's ready to fight if another man looks at her. He loves to fight, and he's the best fighter in this country. So he keeps the other boys pretty well scared off."

"Now, that you're growed up an' all," Dell asked tensely, as they moved toward the feed rack, steadying between them—oh, shades of romance!—a wabbly old cow, "jist what's your ideal of a man?"

June caught her breath at his earnestness. As if she'd tell *him!* Then twin imps danced in her eyes, and she did.

"A hard-working buckaroo about twenty-two, with gray eyes, dark hair, and a nick in his chin—— *"No!"* she cried in panic, as Dell made a dive for her. "Remember, *you promised dad!"*

Then as Dell halted, crushed with remorse at how near he'd come to breaking that pledge, the impact of a snowball took all the jaunty slant out of her tam, and she dashed off after Heck, running him down in a drift, and washing his face for him.

Shucks! She was just teasing him, too! But Dell grinned happily as he went on with his work. Somehow, he felt guilty—having these sessions with June—as if it was taking an unfair ad-

vantage of Tex—Tex, out there on the range, freezing for her, dying a thousand deaths. For he'd known from the first Tex loved June.

Still, Tex saw a lot of her, too. Almost every day she rode out where he was. Dell wondered what June and Tex talked of. Serious stuff—he could tell that by their faces when they rode in. About Texas, maybe—June said they'd come from there, too. But he wasn't worrying about Tex taking an unfair advantage of him. Tex wouldn't go back on a pledge. Dell would bank his life on it!

When spring came, he and Tex would settle this thing. But wasn't he taking a lot for granted? Probably June wouldn't have either of them on a bet! He couldn't see for the life of him why she should love *him*. No girl could see him, anyway, when Tex was around. But suppose she did—how could he be happy—even with June—if it meant a falling out with Tex!

Tex had been so stanch a friend!

He couldn't keep Tex out of his mind these days. He looked so badly—as if he'd been dragged through a knot hole—and was keeping up on pure grit alone. And Dell was glad the strain was most over. For this was the last day of February, and to-morrow—Thunder Brakes!

**To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.**

## THE RESCUE OF A BRAVE ESKIMO WOMAN

IN the summer of 1921 a small party was sent to Wrangel Island, a barren shore over one hundred miles north of Siberia, in the Arctic Ocean, to ascertain how long one could live there. The party, which set out from Nome, intended to claim the island for the British, and also to test Vilhjalmur Stefansson's theory that any armed man could live on any of the Arctic islands for at least a year. The sequel to the expedition, however, came two years later with the rescue of the sole surviving member of the party—an Eskimo woman, Mrs. Ada Blackjack, of Nome, Alaska.

Her lot in the expedition turned out to be two years on an uninhabited island of the Arctic, complete loneliness most of the time, and the continual danger of death. She survived, however, and is now being acclaimed in both England and America as the outstanding heroine of her race. Her early life had been of the rigorous sort from which come brave people. Her inclusion in the party was due to the necessity of having a native seamstress who could fashion clothing quickly from the skins of animals. So the fact of her skill with the needle combined with her ability to speak and understand English won her a place in the ill-fated expedition.

The party took provisions sufficient to last for twelve months, having been assured that additional supplies would reach them the following year. The plan to carry out this promise failed, however, the next summer on account of the heavy ice surrounding the island.

The rescue party found only the Eskimo woman, the others having perished in a futile attempt to reach the mainland of Siberia. Mrs. Blackjack's diary, written while she was utterly alone amid the surrounding seas of ice, her food supply exhausted, is said to constitute the real epic of the North.

# Peg Leg Saves the Doctor's Fee

By F. R. Buckley

*Author of "Never Too Late to Fight," etc.*

AT first, of course, I paid no attention whatever to this row with "Doc" Brewer; for the plain and simple reason that rows are as much a part of Doc as his stethoscope is, and if you are going to associate with him at all you have got to expect them. I well remember that our first quarrel was at Gettysburg, when he thought I had been too rough in dragging him out of the way of a cavalry charge; and on an average we have parted forever about once a week ever since. When we were in the Rangers together, before Brewer took up medicine, the row would be about which of us the girl had smiled at, or who was entitled to the first drink. Then, when he'd settled down as doctor, and me as sheriff and storekeeper of Three Pines, we argued about his discount and whether he had sewed my scalp on straight after the last arrest; and now that we are in our seventies, he raises trouble mainly over our checker games, claiming that I have taken two moves together, or the like of that.

On this particular occasion, he had upset the board just as I had got a won game. Being irritable for one reason and another—including rheumatism—I had mentioned the fact; and as usual Doc had departed, declaring loudly that he would never set foot in my emporium again.

Which should have meant that he dropped in again as usual two evenings later; but he didn't; and then on Friday morning in comes "Pious" Parsons with the news.

"Good morning, Mr. Garfield," says this estimable young man.

"Morning," says I. "Tobacco?"

As will be seen shortly, I had reasons for disliking this jasper, but this dislike was not the reason for my crustiness with him. When a man has reached my age and still has troubles on his neck, it is not good for his temper to be left alone and brooding, the way I had been the night before.

"What, tobacco—me?" says Mr.

Parsons, looking kind of shocked. "You know I don't smoke. What I wanted was two five-cent bars of chocolate, please, Mr. Garfield. And a word in your ear."

"There's the chocolate," says I, shoveling the stuff forth with some distaste. "The ear's at your disposal if you can chuck the word into it from there."

He peeled off the silver paper fastidiously, and started a line of guff about not wishing to cause me pain, also about wishing to return good for evil, because he knew I disapproved of him as a candidate for the hand of Betty Jukes, but that——

"That's more than one word already," says I. "And as to Betty, it ain't me that's doing the disapproving of you—it's Betty herself. Though I can't say I think much of a guy that gets the raspberry off a girl and then goes and gets her pa to try and make her marry him."

Mr. Parsons took a forgiving bite of almond bar.

"Especially," says I, my real feelings bursting to the surface, "when the guy the girl really likes is none other than 'Two-gun' Jack Davis, who can't shoot you because you never carry a weapon, and who is accordingly just about to set fire to a town or something, and give me a whole lot of trouble in my official capacity, which I don't want, already having enough."

"Well," says Mr. Parsons soothingly, "never mind."

"But unfortunately——" I began, raging.

"If the plans of your dear friend, Doc Brewer, go through," continues this model young man," you won't have much more trouble with criminals of any variety, Mr. Garfield."

"Huh?"

"Your dear friend Doc Brewer," says Parsons, neatly folding the lead foil and putting it in his pocket, "is trying to get you put out of office on the ground that you are too old to deal with the local malefactors. You needn't stare at me like that. I heard him doing it, and I thought you ought to know."

"You heard—him—doing—it?"

"I heard him telling the governor of this State, last night at about eight fifteen, that considering the kind of criminals there are around here these days, you were too old. Then he laughed. So did the governor."

A chill ran down my spine, but I didn't let on.

"You're raving," says I. "Whaddya mean, the governor? And where did you hear all this private conversation?"

"I mean the governor of this State," says Parsons coldly, "the Honorable J. V. Wilson, who used to be in the Rangers same time you and Brewer were. I know him because he came to see you last summer. This time he'd been to see Doc Brewer, and they were talking in the Gold Creek railroad station, where I was waiting to get some freight for the ranch. The governor was going back to Austin on the eight twenty train."

"And he said——" says I.

"The governor said: 'Well, now Brewer, how about it—really?' And Doc Brewer said, 'Well, Jim, considering the kind of criminals we get around here these days, I should say he *is* too old.' Then they both laughed."

The chill had spread from my backbone to all four corners of my being. As many can testify to their cost, I am as a matter of fact just about as spry as ever I was, and ever so much more crafty; but at the same time there are a great many who would like this sheriffship for themselves, and for many years it has been their habit, just so soon as a little outbreak of rustling or what not occurred in the county, to try and make me out incapable of dealing with it. One such

outbreak was on right now—that was the worry that had made me irritable with Brewer. Evidently somebody had complained to Wilson, and he'd come down secretly to get Brewer's professional opinion. And seemingly Brewer had knifed me. I saw all this plainly, but yet I wouldn't believe it.

"You stand there," says I to Mr. Parsons, laying a gun on the counter and taking up the telephone receiver.

"You're going to tell him I told you when all I wanted to do was warn——"

"I know the loving-kindness that makes folks rush around with bad news," says I, "but don't worry. You needn't fear anything, if you're telling —Hello! Brewer?"

"Yeah," says his crusty voice. "You want to apologize, Bill Garfield?"

"Not right yet. I want to ask you something. Was Jim Wilson down here last night?"

He didn't answer for a long time; and then, more crustily than ever, he asked what business it was of mine. My heart sank some more.

"Was he?"

"Yes, he was!" roars Brewer. "What of it?"

"Did you," says I, "tell him that, considering the kind of criminals we get around here nowadays, I was too old for my job?"

There was another silence.

"Who's been telling you that?" asked Brewer, kind of gaspy.

"Never mind who!" I went back at him. "Is it true? That's all I want to know from you. Did you say it?"

"Yes, I did!" shouts Doc furiously. "Now what?"

Well, ladies and guests, I felt kind of stunned. Old Doc Brewer! My friend for fifty years and more!

"Why, nothing, I guess," says I weakly. "Except good-by."

And I hung up. I also picked up the revolver in one hand, and the stove poker in the other; and I looked at the excellent Mr. Parsons. He didn't smoke, he didn't drink, he claimed to have a rich father in Arizona, he was earning his living down in Texas in the most admirable way—but it's amazing how I hated him at that moment.

"Now, you," I shouted, starting from behind the counter, "get out of here and stay out!"

Having expressed my gratitude in which manner, I indulged in a few minutes of sorrowful reflection, and then set about the practical business of safeguarding my job.

The reason that I had so far made little progress toward catching the criminals hereinbefore mentioned was, first, that my deputy, Jake Henson, had suddenly found the life of a peace officer unexciting and gone and got married; then again, it was a busy season on the ranches, so that posse-raising was difficult; and finally these cattle thieves, judging by their tracks, were four in number, which made lone stalking of them inconceivable to any sane man. However, after the news Mr. Parsons had brought, and after Doc Brewer's confirmation of it, I was not exactly sane. When Two-gun Jack Davis came over—which he did in great haste about two hours later—I was already locking up my store; with the idea not only of going out thief-hunting single-handed and without a clew to the thieves' whereabouts, but also with the firm intention of bringing all four of them in unwounded beyond maybe a wallop or two over the head. You see, it is the duty of an arresting officer to provide medical attention for his captives if they need it, which is usually the case with mine; Doc Brewer is the only medical man within fifteen miles, and the State pays him two dollars a head for each criminal he attends. I was determined that he shouldn't make a nickel off my pris-

oners in the future; which I know sounds cuckoo, but try having your oldest and only pal round on you like he had and see what you feel like yourself. What I mean—it's sort of dazing; for instance, when Jack Davis told me the rustlers were even then at work on the Triangle Bar herd, and that he'd just got away with two bullets through his hat, I took in the information and acted upon it, sort of automatically, without excitement. In fact, having saddled and mounted my nag, Tony, I had already ridden a couple of miles in the direction of the Triangle Bar before I noticed that Davis was with me.

"Hey!" says I, reining in.

"We better hurry," says Two-gun, doing likewise. "They'll be——"

"We will hurry," says I, "but in different directions. You, for instance, will turn around and hurry back toward my store. This particular bandit hunt is a one-man job—and I'm the man. On your way."

"But——" says Davis.

"I know all about 'but,'" I told him, drawing a gun. "However, what I said goes. Start back. Go on."

"I ain't going," says the young man; and, seeing me draw a deep breath, continues, "nor you needn't start counting up to ten on the promise that you'll shoot me, either, Mr. Garfield. In the first place, I know you won't; and in the second, I'd just as soon you did."

He was alluding to the way Pious Parsons had cut him out at the Jukes' place; and though normally I should have called him a fool, in my then frame of mind I quite sympathized with him. Moreover, as he'd pointed out, time was valuable.

"Yeah," says I. "Well, now, listen. I'll let you come with me on one condition; you can either accept it without askin' questions, or you can get out after all. We'll see how serious you are about wanting to get killed. These guys have got to be brought in without a single bad wound on 'em; get what I mean?"

He stared at me.

"They can be walloped over the head, or the wind knocked out of them," says I, entirely forgetting that if they were killed outright they wouldn't need a doctor, either, "but they mustn't be shot, gouged, or otherwise ill-treated to the point of needing medical attention. See? Come on, now. Yes or no?"

He thought I was stark, staring mad, but apparently he felt much the same way himself; for he said, "All right" with enthusiasm, and so we rode on together.

"Four of them, as usual?" I asked, having had no time for questions since we started.

"Uh-huh."

"And how many head?"

"Fifty or sixty."

"They'll try to get 'em down Dead Man's Gulch and across the Rio Grande, then," says I, thoughtful. "They couldn't get that lot far across country."

"So I thought," says Two-gun Jack; and when we got to the Gulch, it turned out that we were both right. There, in the last rays of the setting sun, was this bunch of cattle, milling around on the edge of the water. The river was a bit high, owing to an unusual amount of rain; the beeves didn't seem to like the look of it; and the four men in charge were so busy trying to urge them into the ford that we got halfway down the gully before they were aware of us.

"Look out!" says Davis, behind me, as one rustler looked at us and shouted to the other three men; and I heard him gasp as, instead of drawing a gun, or dismounting or anything, I pulled off the ancient trick of rising in my stirrups, waving both arms violently,

and shouting "Hi!" to the men on the river's edge.

"Hi!" I yelled again. "Wait a minute! Wait a minute!"

Being long-sighted, I had by this time satisfied myself that they were strangers in the district, who wouldn't recognize me in my official capacity. They must have known, of course, that the appearance of even a civilian at this moment could bode them no good, and they had guns in their hands; but, like so many of us, they were human, and they were therefore subject to curiosity. They wanted to know what we could possibly have to say to them, and they figured that, having found out, they could shoot us later. So that I had no difficulty in riding up to the chief jasper—at least, the biggest of them—and knocking him off his horse with a right to the jaw.

Now, if Two-gun Jack had known enough to follow my example, things would have been much simpler; but he was young and not up to these things, and besides, as his name implies, he was more used to weapons than to fists, so that he lost the precious moment wherein we could have evened the odds. Seeing that one of the three remaining guys was about to blow my skull in from behind, he grabbed his wrist and sent the bullet into my shoulder instead; but then it took him several seconds more to transfer this grip to the jasper's neck and unhorse him. And, even at that, the rustler wasn't done with like my man; so that within thirty seconds, we were doing battle with three extremely ugly individuals, each capable of firing six fatal shots.

I suppose they figured they had a picnic on their hands, and got careless; I can't explain otherwise how we came out of that business alive. While turning my horse to charge another guy's, I lost the top of my right ear, and had my star of office darn near driven through my ribs; just at the moment I stunned the guy concerned by hitting him over the head with a revolver barrel, another bullet cut a long groove down my left thigh; and when I dismounted to pick up a good-sized rock for throwing purposes, a .45 slug hit the stone and drove lead splinters all over my face. The next bullet from that gun would have killed me—the man had got a steady aim at not more than three feet distant—when Jack Davis took heart and knocked him off his horse. And I was able to repay this favor by throwing my rock into the countenance of the last rustler just as he prepared to change the location of Mr. Davis' spine.

So that everybody was happy, especially—as I found while we were tying up our prisoners for transportation—the life-weary Mr. Davis. It appeared that he had realized, when in the thick of battle, that no matter how many Pious Parsonses there were around, and no matter how much they were favored by Mr. Jukes, he still had a chance of winning Betty so long as he stayed alive.

"Whereas, if I was dead," says the young philosopher solemnly, "where should I be then, Mr. Garfield?"

"Gold Creek Cemetery," says I. "Ready to start?"

My two wounds were aching considerable, and I had an idea that I must be losing quite a lot of blood; moreover, I was fed up with this young man for having hope spring eternal in his human breast, whereas Doc Brewer's treachery still had me in the depths of despair. Still, the boy looked so young and excited and all that, that I felt inclined to help him just a little.

"There's no room for these," says I therefore, "in the Three Pines lock-up. Tell you what. The Jukes have got a good strong barn or something, haven't they?"

"Oh, boy!" says young Davis, his eyes brightening at the idea of a triumphant procession.

"All right," says I, "then we'll leave 'em there."

Which we did; our success being the greater because the stock we'd saved turned out to be the property of old man Jukes—rather special stock, so far as I could make out in my dazed condition—which had been sent over to the Triangle Bar for conditioning. Jukes couldn't conceal his gratitude; and since I didn't feel like having my hand shaken or my back slapped, he naturally had to bestow these tokens of appreciation on the person of young Jack. Now, whatever your views on rich sons-in-law, you cannot be entirely mechanical about this kind of thing, especially if you and the hero in question are taking alternate swigs out of the same bottle labeled "Sarsaparilla Essence;" and, in point of fact, it wasn't fifteen minutes until Jukes and Davis were on such terms as to give Mr. Parsons—who was present—a visible pain in the neck. I was quite surprised, in fact, at the expression adorning this young man's countenance as he saw Betty enter and address herself to Mr. Davis as though nobody else were present. For a nonsmoker, nondrinker, and nonswearer, he certainly had a mean scowl.

"It seems to me," says he suddenly, and with the evident intention of busting up the party, "that we ought to get a doctor for Mr. Garfield. He's——"

"He's quite capable," says I, arising with dignity and sitting down again rather more suddenly than I'd expected to, "of managing his own affairs, thank you, Mr. Parsons."

There was kind of a black veil before my eyes, but I heard hurried footsteps on the floor, and felt round my neck arms which I recognized as Betty's.

"He's badly wounded," says her voice, apparently from a long way off. "Phone for Doc Brewer, somebody. Quick!"

Well, of course, in my then frame of mind, and after all I'd just done to prevent Brewer from earning a few dollars, this suggestion would have brought me back from the dead. I arose, with more success this time, and announced that Mr. Jukes could put down the receiver which he had snatched off the hook, because I was no longer a patient of Brewer's.

"Clark, of Longhorn City, is the jasper for my money," I added.

"But he won't come all the way out here!"

"Which is why I'm going all the way over there," says I, "after having duly taken your receipt for four prisoners delivered in good secondhand condition."

Well, they argued, and Betty wept, and there was a great hullaballoo generally, but of course I had my way in the end; even though Betty—with Davis in closer coöperation than was really necessary—bandaged me up to the eyes before permitting me to start. She had been a sort of nurse in the war, and really she made such a thorough job of me that I doubted whether any doctor, let alone Clark, who is a born fool, could better it. And I was tired, and the Longhorn City trail ran right past my store; so that, arriving in Three Pines, I more or less decided to call it a day. I dismounted, took my hat, boots, and star off, and turned in to get a little sleep. I see now that I was more or less deluded by the sarsaparilla I'd had at Jukes', and felt much better than I actually was; but I had no suspicion of this fact until I was awakened, at about six that evening, by Pious Parsons. I then found I had a blinding headache and what seemed to be a high fever.

"Do you want me to send for Doc

Brewer?" says the young man, who had come over for laundry starch or something like that.

Well, I may have been a trifle delirious, but this would have been about the last straw anyhow, and I treated it as such. I believe I threw things, but dusk had fallen and I was very shaky at best, so that Parsons escaped without any genuine tokens of my esteem; after which I lay down and tried to get back into dreamland. Anybody who has ever been shot and left without medical attention will know what that meant. I lay first on one side and then on the other, singing hymns of hate against that whiskery old traitor Brewer, and wondering whether he hadn't been right after all about my being too old for this kind of foolishness; wishing that he were there to give me a shot of morphine; and at the same time going all over the things we'd been through together, ending up with his doing me this here foul trick.

After about two hours of which, the telephone bell began to ring and kept on ringing until it was a question of whether I should get up and answer it or have a hole bored clean through my brains. It took me some time to stagger across the room, and some time more to figure out how to get the receiver to my ear; and after this it was a long time before I could gather the meaning of the message somebody was yelling at me.

It was Ben Pokeson speaking—the town marshal of Acacia City—and he seemed all worried up over the fact that some one was beating it into my territory with the idea of hiding out in the Three Pines County hills.

"But who is this?" I asked woozily. "And what do you want me to do about it?"

"It's the jasper that's robbed the Acacia National Bank!" shouts Ben. "Can't you hear what I'm tellin' you? He dynamited the safe an' shot four citizens an' got twenty-minutes' start by cuttin' every girth in town. He's comin' your way. I'm asking you to head him off. Have you gone crazy, or what?"

The news sort of soaked gradually into my brain and then, telling Ben that the matter should have my attention, I turned around and started methodically to put on my leg, boot, and similar equipment, for the second time that day. I was extremely foggy about what I was doing; in fact, the main idea in my mind as I mounted Tony and rode off in the general direction of Bald Knob was that, while it was desirable and even necessary that I should capture this criminal, I must on no account throw any business into the way of Doc Brewer. It was in order that there should be no possible mistake about this that I drew and unloaded, one after another, my two revolvers, and threw the shells away.

Just as I'd finished this interesting process, there was a flash and a bang from about fifty yards ahead of me, and one of the bandages which Betty had so kindly put around my head unwrapped itself and came down over my eyes.

Quite evidently, I reflected—having slid off my horse into the shelter of a live-oak tree—I'd stumbled on the bank robber; just as evidently, the thing to do was to grab him off and retrieve the bank's money; but also, and never-to-be-forgotten-even-while-the-bullets-buzzed-around-me, the said processes must be carried through without the aid of Doc Brewer. Surveying the surrounding territory as well as possible in the darkness—and getting a bullet-driven bit of bark in my eye as I did so—I lay down on my tummy and started out to gain victory without bloodshed.

It was a long, long crawl.

As I've said, the distance from the tree to where the jasper was ambushed was no more than fifty yards; but if I was going to do anything but give my life for my county, I had to take the gentleman in the rear. This made a total journey of about three hundred feet, mainly consisting of cat-claw or watercourses. One time, owing to the dancing of stars before my eyes, I crawled bang into the middle of a hollow clump of cactus, and had the dickens of a time finding my way out again. Then for a few minutes the enemy ceased fire—probably wondering why I didn't shoot back; and I lay panting and unsure of my direction, expecting him to shift position and give me all my trouble for nothing. However, I guess he thought he saw something again—probably the evening breeze twitched the bundle of bandages I'd discarded behind the tree; for his gun recommenced its racket, and by the next time he stopped to reload I was no more than ten feet behind him. He was lying behind a fallen tree, in a prone position that would have brought joy to the heart of a musketry instructor; and so, when he started to pour another string of shots into that inoffensive like oak, I found it a comparatively simple matter to crawl up, cross his left leg over the back of his right knee, double the right leg up over, and sit on the whole edifice of limbs in a manner that should have held him securely if not comfortably while I fumbled for handcuffs.

But alas! his views were otherwise. Rarely, in fact, have I known a man whose views were as otherwise as the views of this masked bandit, who now swung the barrel of his rifle backward and knocked me several feet in a nor'-nor'easterly direction. One would never have guessed, from his foolish behavior in shooting at that tree when I wasn't behind it, how extremely otherwise this jasper did in fact turn out to be. And I perceived at once that, in addition to great natural ability, he had a sound knowledge of my favorite methods of fighting. For instance, though we were both on the ground at the beginning, he made no attempt to keep to the horizontal so that I could batter his head against Mother Earth. He stood up, and nothing but my rolling rapidly to one side prevented him from jumping on my face—a long jump, which he made with his knees drawn up and his long boot heels aimed for my eyeballs. Even when I grabbed one of his ankles, he didn't want to join me on terra firma, and even resisted to the point of pulling out a revolver. With this he would doubtless have done me several pieces of no good had not a lucky yank tripped him and brought him down at last to my level.

Then the fun began; because, while my natural aptitude for and experience in ground fighting was far superior to his, it must be remembered that I am, after all, well advanced in my seventies, and that for reasons already given I was not feeling as spry as usual that night. Though I'm almost inclined to give the delirium the credit for letting me keep on with the man when he was treating me in a way no rational human being would have stood for a moment. He was choking me, what I mean; and at the same time he was trying to gouge me, and simultaneously he was shoving his knee back and forth into my ribs with a grinding motion that was very unpleasing. In fact, if so be he hadn't mistaken my mouth for my eye, and accordingly got his thumb into it, the consequences to me might have been really serious. As it was, I selected the exact spot at the base of the nail which is one of the most sensitive spots existing on the human form, and I bit my friend on it as hard as possible. When he loosed his grip for a moment, I fur-

thermore kicked up violently with my peg leg and caught him just where the neck joins the skull. This is exactly the spot where the average man keeps his medulla, which controls all of his bodily actions that are worth controlling; and it is a well-known fact that if there is anything that will make a medulla down tools, it is being kicked with an ironbound peg leg.

So, with a gasp and the mention of a word which I should like to believe was "mother!" my little playmate lost consciousness entirely and rolled off my chest.

Yes, ladies, gentlemen, and cowpunchers, that rabbit kick had certainly saved my life; and it just shows the state of mind I was in, that instead of being grateful to Doc Brewer for having shown me how to perform it, I merely lay there for five minutes congratulating myself on having done the old skunk out of another two dollars. I was almost what you'd call a monomaniac—so absorbed in thinking about this revenge of mine that the new wounds I'd gathered in the confusion didn't hurt me at all, and I experienced no surprise even at finding that my adversary—now showing signs of returning consciousness—was none other than Pious Parsons.

It turned out later that this young man had the habit of going around representing himself as an eligible son-in-law with the idea of marrying the local heiress, in default of which he would blow the local bank and skip off. Altogether, a remarkable young fellow, and an astonishing way of making a living; but I hadn't any interest in him or his business just then. Grief, rage, and uncharitableness against Doc Brewer filled my mind; and, in fact, I seem to remember making up a chanty about him and the way I'd done him in the eye about ten dollars' worth, and singing the same all the way home. It related how I might have got myself so shot up that I flapped in the breeze, but that I'd shown Brewer that I was neither too old for my job nor a jasper it was safe to betray.

Pious Parsons—alias "Montana Jack," "Gentleman Harry Blaufuss," "Soapy Bill Keen," et cetera, et cetera—on his trial said I'd sung it over and over again; and the judge, who was with me and Brewer in the Rangers, gave him only twenty years on that account, claiming that he'd had some of his punishment already.

Anyhow, be that as it may, we finally reached home. You may imagine that by this time I was feeling worse than ever, especially in view of the fact that Pious Parsons had chirked up wonderfully, and promised to take a whole lot of watching during the night. I got off my horse in a sort of daze; yanked my prisoner off, half shouldered and half carried him up the steps into the store; and found—who do you think, standing there under the oil lamp, eating peaches out of the original package?—Doc Brewer.

"Yeah," says he, glaring at me over his glasses. "You can gag at me, Bill Garfield. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Go and lie down on that couch over there."

He gave me a push that seated me on it willy-nilly, and Mr. Parsons seemed to think this the equivalent of permission for him to go. Brewer reached into his coat-tails and countermanded the order.

"You stay where you are," says he, pistol in one hand and his mouth full of peaches, "or I'll make you think that you've swallowed a gun, young man. When I've gone to all the trouble of pulling Jack Davis through measles, mumps, and chickenpox, not to mention setting all his larger bones at least twice, I guess it would be a pleasure to take a coyote like you and fix you so——"

"Speakin' of coyotes," says I, "who

told you to go monkeyin' with my prisoner?"

"You go lie——" says Brewer, pushing me again; but this time I was ready for him, and so only staggered backward a few feet.

"I'll have a lunacy commission telling you something pretty soon," says the doctor furiously. "A man of your age acting the way you have been! I've heard all about it! I'll bet there's enough lead in you right now to make a statue of Methuselah, and look at the way you've torn your nice new ear I made for you! And all what for? I try to save you your job, and you try to do me out of the few fees I ever do get. I know! Don't tell me! Sit down!"

This was a longer speech than I ever knew Brewer to make; it had me dizzy, but I got one thing out of it.

"Trying to save me my job! Haw haw!" says I. "Didn't this very guy here hear you telling the governor that considering the kind of criminals there were around here——"

"Yeah!" roars Brewer, quite forgetting about Pious Parsons in the heat of the moment, "that's what I did say. Wasn't it only the night before that, just before you accused me of cheatin' at checkers, when it was only an accident—weren't we both sayin' that these here modern criminals were too clever for any but a foxy old guy with lots of experience? And when the governor came down because somebody's been complainin' about you, didn't I tell him just that—that you were too old for the criminals around here, but that anybody younger would be laid away in jigtime? And didn't I get him steamed up to the point of tryin' to get a bonus voted by the legislature for your long service? Yeah, I did; and the next thing I know here you are——"

I saw it all. It kind of burst over me, if you know what I mean; I felt weak in the knees, and sort of leaned up against the counter. If it hadn't been for the chill of the knob of the stove poker, on which my hand happened to fall, I think I should have fainted.

"Doc——" says I weakly.

"Now I've got a month's work patching you up again," says Brewer, not at all appeased, "and as for the ten dollars I ought to have got from these five criminals you've caught, I never will see that."

He laid down his revolver entirely at this, and started toward where he'd put his surgical case. When anybody he's fond of is concerned, he is very absent-minded about everything else, is Brewer. He had, for instance, quite forgotten about Mr. Pious Parsons, who at this moment I perceived to be standing in the doorway, grinning mockingly at me, and obviously just about to make a run for my horse with the idea of escaping, handcuffs and all. It has been done before, with most excellent results; but it wasn't done that time. Seeing that grin, I remembered that it was Pious Parsons, with his eavesdropping, that had brought all this about. My fingers closed on the stove poker; I made one last sort of dying leap toward the doorway, and I did my very best to make amends.

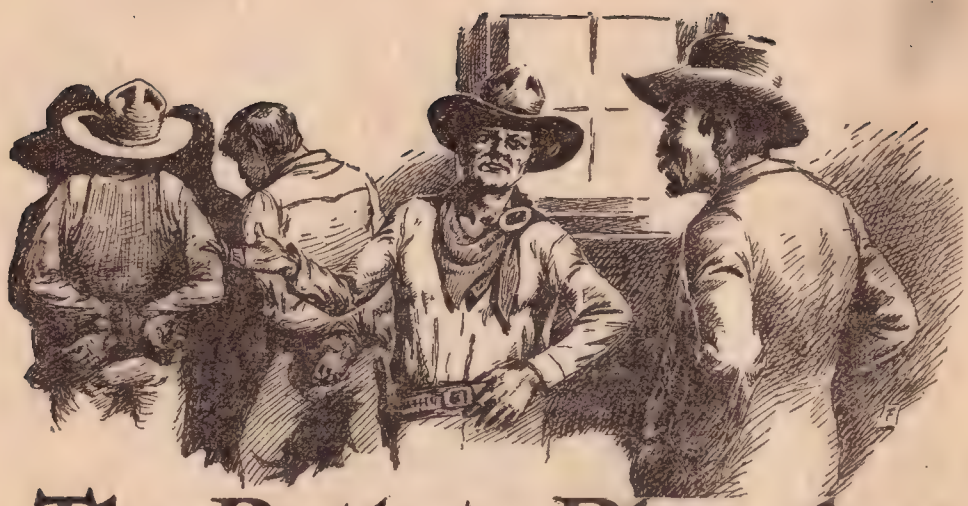
"What the——" says Brewer, turning around at the crash.

He tells me that I was still standing up, with a sort of foolish grin on my face; and that when he turned, I picked up Mr. Parsons, now quite past all thoughts of escaping, and brought him, none too gently, to the center of the floor.

"It was all a mistake, doc," says I, dropping the patient at his feet, "and I'm sorry!"

"Why, you——" says Brewer.

"Anyhow," says I, pointing to Mr. Parsons before fainting, "here's a good two dollars for you, after all."



# The Path to Plunder

## By Max Brand

*Author of "Weakling of the Wild," etc.*

**Synopsis of Preceding Chapters**

JOHN TEMPLAR, engaged by wealthy Andrew Condon to protect him from some unnamed danger, is embroiled with Lister, Condon's nephew and heir, also with Snyder, his butler, and Hong Kong, the Chinese cook, who is beautiful but dumb—as far as speaking English is concerned.

Condon is murdered. Hong Kong escapes. Snyder disappears. Lister becomes morose. Suspicion is rife. Snyder returns, offering to lead the sheriff to the murderer's lair if promised his liberty. Templar's friend, Danny O'Shay, joins the pursuit. Assembled outside a remote shack they wait vainly for Snyder to emerge.

Snyder is found dead, disfigured beyond recognition. The posse returns to town. Lister tells Templar that Condon has cheated him of his mother's estate. Templar sees Hong Kong in town, pursues and captures her, but she again eludes him and later rides off, dressed as a man. Templar and O'Shay trail her and find she is trailing two men. Reaching a mountain town, they see her horse at the forge. They find lodging in a farmhouse on the edge of the town.

### CHAPTER XXIX.

#### THINGS BEGIN TO THICKEN.

IT was a snug little room, and Templar made himself quickly at home in it. It had a flimsy little stove in one corner, and this he filled with wood from the bin in the hall and started a large fire. Next he stripped off his clothes and wrung them out the window. After that, he arranged his garments on chairs around the stove and soon had them steaming, while he wrapped himself in a blanket from the bed and settled down to a magazine of uncertain age, for the entire front part of it was torn away, and all the edges of the pages turned up, yellow and brittle with time.

The magazine did not interest him long. He threw it aside and began to clean his guns; he had taken down one of them and vainly looked for dirt in it when a bullet split through an upper pane of his window and noisily ripped a furrow across the plaster ceiling.

He dropped from his chair to his hands and knees; then he sprang to his window and peered out. What with rain and dusk together, the lamplight inside and the dimness without, he was able to see little, but he did

make out a shadowy form scurrying down over the kitchen roof. At that form he took a snap shot; a frightened yell answered him, and the silhouette disappeared over the edge of the roof.

He was half inclined to follow; had he been dressed, he would have done so.

Instead, he retreated to his chair by the stove again, and wondered gravely what could have happened. He stared at the window. It was misted thickly with the steam which had risen from his drying clothes, and certainly no one could have been able to aim with any accuracy from outside the pane at a figure within. Moreover, the shot which had been fired seemed to have come from a distance; certainly from a greater distance than the kitchen roof.

He was dressing in furious haste when he heard the peg leg of the old man of the house coming up the hall; there was a knock, and he bade his host enter.

It was a low doorway, but the cripple stood easily under it. Time and his bad leg had bowed him until he stood no higher than a child.

"You ain't hurt?" he asked.

"That's where the shot traveled," said Templar, and pointed to the furrow in the plaster of the ceiling, and the scattered white débris which had fallen to the floor. "How could it have happened?"

"When I was a boy," said the other, closing the door behind him, "we used to hear of folks shooting out the windows, but they mostly shot out the front lights. I dunno that 'twas done for fun!"

"Some one had climbed up on your roof—a smallish man, as near as I could make him out," said Templar. "I'm going down to see if I can spot his tracks!"

"You won't do much good that way," replied the other. "This here rain—it'll wash the sand in and close over tracks pretty quick. Maybe you got some friends in this town that want to see you?"

"I've never been here before in my life," answered Templar.

He tugged on his belt, heavy with cartridges, and then began the hasty work of reassembling his Colt which he had taken apart for cleaning. The old man watched with interest.

"You could do it in the dark, I suppose?" he remarked.

"I could," Templar nodded. "Who sleeps in this room ordinarily?"

"Nobody," said the host. He added: "No, that shot was meant for you. And a terible bad shot it was, too!" He shook his head. "Somebody's got a broken heart for making a miss as bad as that," he suggested.

"How far off did the first shot sound?" asked Templar. "Were you in the kitchen?"

"I was. It was from the edge of the trees, I should've said."

"The edge of the trees!" exclaimed Templar. "But, man, how could any one see through that white, misted window from that distance?"

"They couldn't—not nobody!"

"It gets a little thicker," said Templar through his teeth. "And I'm going to have trouble started for this!"

He jammed on his hat as he spoke and turned toward the door when the little cripple exclaimed:

"Hello! What we got here?" With his cane, he tapped a piece of paper which lay on the floor just inside the door.

"Who," said the old man, "has been shovin' paper under there?"

He jerked the door wide; the hall was empty beyond it, and dimly lighted by the lamp at the turn.

Templar, in the meantime, had snatched up the paper and unfolded it. He found written inside, in a bold, rapid, strong hand:

Templar, leave this trail; there's nothing for you at the end of it. But first get the sheriff when he comes back to town this evening and take him to the Dunbar Hotel. There are two lodged on the top floor in that hotel. One is a big fellow; the other is rather small. Both middle-aged. They came into town to-day. Both of them are railroad robbers. They are freshly out of prison and they should be put back in jail. As for a charge, they have with them a Chinese girl whom they are taking up through the mountains to dispose of in a place where she will bring them in a sum of money. If you attack them carelessly, you will have a savage fight; they both are expert shots; they both are desperate men. Take them by surprise and all will be well. YOUR WELL-WISHER.

P. S. You never can solve the riddle.

"It ain't a love letter, I take it," said the old fellow, watching the face of Templar closely.

"It's not," replied Templar, and folded the letter small. "It's not a love letter," he added slowly, thrusting the note into a pocket.

But, in the meantime, his brain was reeling. He was certain that no man in this town could know him except by sheerest accident, for the place was far, far from his line of travel in the past, yet here was word from some one who not only knew him, but also knew, as it appeared, the business which had brought him here. Who could this person be?

There was a vague flicker of big O'Shay in this note. As far as Templar could recall, he never had seen a specimen of the giant's handwriting, but just such a large, bold, and sweeping hand he would expect from O'Shay. Yet it was impossible that Shay's enormous bulk could have approached the door of the room so silently. Most of all, it was perfectly absurd to imagine O'Shay delivering such a message.

Outside of O'Shay, however, he could conceive of no one who might have written, and the blank impossibility of the whole thing made Templar's brain spin as though he had received a blow.

He went hastily to the window and leaned out, breathing deep.

"Young feller," said the old man, "you've been shook up pretty bad by something in that note. But you might remember that a bullet already has come through that window."

Templar paid no attention. Such was his mental turmoil that physical danger seemed nothing to him.

"And where might your big friend be?" asked the host, his voice sharpened a little with suspicion.

"He? He's gone out."

"I didn't hear him."

"Sometimes he moves like a shadow."

There was a soft sound of incredulity from the other, and then he spoke in a different tone.

"Young man," said he, "I wish you luck. I been through some narrow alleys myself, when I was young. Same time, I don't hanker after bullets and broken windows. Not now that I'm old. You'll pay for that window and that broken ceiling, maybe?"

"I'll pay for it! I'll pay for it, of course," said Templar. "I'll pay for it if I don't go mad," he added, breaking out into mingled wonder and rage.

The old fellow waved to him, as much as to say that from that moment he stepped out of the mystery, and then he hobbled off down the hall. His going left Templar with a clearer mind, and he determined that he would no longer try to read between the lines, but simply follow the advice of the writer of the note, no matter what came of it.

From every aspect, however, it was bewildering. For instance, if some one understood that there were two men in the town who should be arrested, why did he not take the information himself to the sheriff?

That might be because he did not

wish to make enmity between himself and two dangerous criminals. But still it remained most wonderful that any one in this mountain town should have known of Templar at all; or, knowing of him, should have understood that he was in the place at that moment; or, knowing that he was there, should have dreamed however faintly of the work which he was attempting to do.

There was a slight sound outside the window; and the great head and shoulders of O'Shay appeared.

"Go back," said Templar shortly. "It's no good. The old man has been up here and knows that you went out. Go back and come in through the front door. Trouble has been popping since you left; hurry!"

O'Shay was not one to ask needless questions. He disappeared, and presently the front door was heard to open, and he mounted the stairs, which creaked heavily under his massive weight. He entered the room and flung his wet hat at the stove. It dropped with a squash of wetness to the floor.

"I been seeing things," said O'Shay softly.

"Seeing what?"

"You remember the two thugs who sat in the restaurant back yonder in Last Luck?"

"And watched us? I remember. Are they here, man?"

"Man, they are."

Templar blinked.

"The girl, I'll lay my money," said the big man, "was following the pair of them. And what are they following?"

"Goodness knows! Why do you ask me?"

"The five million. That's what they're following. Things are beginning to thicken up, son! We're meeting up with old chums on this here trail!"

"And one of them," muttered Templar, "nearly tagged me. There's his mark!"

## CHAPTER XXX.

### "THERE'S A SHERIFF!"

O'SHAY listened to the story with perfectly calm attention. His interest even appeared to wander from the words of Templar, and he spent a long time standing at the window and looking earnestly up at the furrow which the bullet had made in the ceiling.

"And after that, I got this note, shoved under the door by a ghost," said Templar. "I thought that hall flooring would creak if even a child walked over it, but some one came up to that door and shoved the note under. The old man saw it, and pointed it out."

"Maybe the old man put it there?"

Templar started violently.

"The old man!" he echoed, and then sat down with force.

"Why not?"

"Great Scott! Man, what can he possibly have to do with us? What can he know about us and our game?"

"He may not know anything, but he may have carried the note. For that matter, he may have written it."

"Are you trying to drive me mad, Danny?"

"Not a mite. But you gotta consider every chance. The trick you throw away in this deal is the trick that loses the game for us. Anyway, we know that we got a friend in the fracas."

"Go on, Danny," said the younger man, hopeless and helpless. "I don't follow your drift, but you go ahead and lemme know what's what."

"The fellow who fired that shot," remarked the big man, "was a friend."

"A kind friend who used me for a target? Go on, Danny; I admit it's

fun to hear you make a fool of yourself for once. But step on and demonstrate, Danny. Prove your point if you can!"

He lay back in a chair with a grin and waited. The brow of the giant had contracted.

"I got the hunch," he said, "but I still got to do the thinking. Oh, Johnnie, when once I get out of this job, I'm gonna go off in the desert where I'll never have to think or talk again so long as I live! I tell you, son, nobody would have fired at your shadow behind the window and missed it as bad as that!"

"A revolver can take all sorts of bad twists in your hand," corrected Templar.

"Sure it can, but that ain't a revolver shot."

"You've found it, maybe?"

"No. I haven't found it. But look at the window it broke."

"I see it."

"If you think I'm wrong, you take hold and send another shot through the other pane of the window, me boy."

"What would happen?"

"You would jes' nacherally blow the pane all to bits, Johnnie. But that other bullet, it crisped in through the glass sweet and clean, and only filled it full of cracks."

"There's a two-inch hole where that bullet went through."

"I tell you, if it had been a Colt .45, the slug would have bashed every bit of the pane onto the floor."

"Have you any reasons for that?"

"Suppose you drag a knife slow through soft butter—the butter drags along with the knife, don't it?"

"Naturally."

"But if you whip the knife through quick, no butter sticks to the blade?"

"That's right."

"Now, old son, you get a rifle bullet, and it's a smaller caliber than a revolver slug, and it's traveling three times as fast, and it snakes through things and just bores a clean hole. It chinked a little hole through the glass, bigger than itself, I admit. But that was a rifle shot, and don't you doubt it!"

Templar was silent.

"It proves," went on O'Shay, "that him that fired the shot aimed to fire high."

"Why should he have fired at all?"

"There was a man on the roof outside, wasn't there?"

"There was, of course."

"Well, son, if that rifle bullet hadn't been fired, the man on the roof would've sneaked up to the window and drilled you fair and clean, and that would've been the end of the trail for you, Johnnie me lad!"

"I'm an ass!" exclaimed Templar with irritation. "I should have thought of that!"

"It ain't your fault," responded O'Shay with a grin. "You was sent to school too long; you wasn't raised to think!"

"But now the letter, Danny? What will we do about that?"

"Do what it tells us to do. Him that wrote the letter also fired the shot. You got to follow the advice of folks that have saved your life. They've the right to believed."

"When do we do it?"

"Now, son, now!"

"Explain one thing to me. How in the name of everything mysterious could there be any man in this town who knows us and all about our affairs?"

"I've explained enough for one sitting," replied O'Shay. "I'm gunna stop thinking now, and start in with some action. Because, me son, there ain't any doubt that the two that are named here in the letter are the two that wached us in Last Luck, and the taking of them ain't going to be any party for babies with their milk teeth.

It's gunna be a crust that'll take molars to crunch, Johnnie, and this is the part of the game where you can begin to shine!"

They left the room at once. In the lower hall, they passed their ancient host, and he raised a finger at them with a smile.

"Supper's in one hour," he said. "Don't you be late!"

They went on through the door.

"The old man begins to give me a chill," confided Templar.

"Old men always do," replied O'Shay. "It's either what they know or what they don't know that gives folks a terrible shock!"

They turned up the street.

The rain had diminished into a fine mist through which the nearer windows poured broad, golden shafts, and more distant rays were refracted into many colors, scattering like sheaves of brilliant spears. So low rolled the rain clouds that sometimes the roofs were lost in fog.

"A grand night for murders," suggested O'Shay.

From a man who went by, glimmering in his slicker as though in polished steel, they learned the way to the sheriff's house at the head of the street, and there they entered the squeaking garden gate and thumped up the steps of the front porch. A busy woman, red from the fire, jerked open the front door and frowned out at them.

"The sheriff's just in, and he's restin'," she told them.

"He's got to stop resting and see us," O'Shay informed her. "You tell him that, will you? We got a couple of birds in hand for him."

She hesitated, as though minded to send them roughly about their business, and then she turned away and retreated, leaving the door open.

"We'll leave the letter out of it," said O'Shay. "It's better out than in; there's too many things that might make him ask questions about us, and the first thing that I found out west of the Mississippi is that the less the law knows about you the better it is for the law—and for you!"

A bull-necked little man who looked fat and was simply strong came waddling toward them. He had a pair of spectacles pushed up on his forehead, a newspaper in his hand, and felt slippers on his feet.

"Hello, boys," said he, "are you comin' in?"

"We ain't going to drip on your carpet," said O'Shay. "We just got a couple of ex-train robbers down the street in the hotel. Maybe you would like to have a chat with them?"

"They've done their stretch, have they?" asked the sheriff.

"They've done it, I suppose."

"How much?"

"Fifteen years."

"Well," said the sheriff, "fifteen years makes a man either hammered steel or brittle cast iron."

"These are steel," responded O'Shay.

"What have you got against 'em?"

"Nothing worth talking about. A shot in the dark, so to speak!"

"Is that so?"

"I ain't here for fun," said O'Shay. "They got a chink girl along with 'em. Smuggled goods, I suppose."

"A chink girl—there in the hotel?"

"They got her done up as a puncher. She makes a sort of a man."

"I hate a chink smuggler worse'n I hate a snake," said the sheriff with heat. "Boys, you rest your feet a minute in here while I jump into my things!"

He disappeared; they felt the whole house jarring to the shock of his feet as he ran back toward his room.

"There's a fighting sheriff!" said O'Shay with appreciation. "You take the number of counties there is in the West, and the work there is for the

sheriff to do in 'em, and dog-gone me, kid, if it ain't wonderful where the supply of straight-shooting sheriffs comes from!"

The sheriff returned almost as soon as this speech was ended. He was shrugging a slicker around his shoulders and buckling a gun belt around his hips at the same time. His hat sagged over one ear.

"A quick change," complimented O'Shay.

"I used to be a fireman," grinned the sheriff, "before I decided to settle down and have a quiet life. Is this gent with you?"

He indicated the silent Templar.

"I'm the general, sheriff," said O'Shay, "and he's my army. You and me can do the thinking, and he'll do the work for us."

The sheriff merely grunted: "Standing still makes cold feet. Let's get started."

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### TOP STORY.

THEY worked down a muddy, narrow alley between the hotel and its adjoining building, and so came into the litter of a back yard. Above them rose the rear of the hotel which, since it was built on ground sloping sharply from the street, towered high above them. There was first a rock wall, and above this the cellar story, with four stories of the hotel proper rising higher.

It was in the top story of all, seemingly a vast distance as they looked up through the rain mist, that the room of the two strangers was located.

"Wait here," said the sheriff, "the pair of you, and make sure that nobody manages to get out of that window. You can shoot, I hope?"

"I hope we can," said Danny O'Shay, "but would you mind tellin' me what you'll do yourself, sheriff?"

"Me? What should I do? I'll go around and up the hall and make the arrest, or else drive 'em out through the window."

"There are two of 'em," suggested O'Shay.

"I have two guns," responded the sheriff carelessly.

"Partner," said big O'Shay, "it's happened to me in me life that I've had to mingle with some hard gents, and I've done my share of fighting, but I wouldn't care to be mixed up with the two of those. Besides, you'd never be able to sneak up on 'em."

"Why not?" asked the sheriff.

"Nobody else has a room in that top story. The rest of the rooms are blank there. Maybe it's a reason why the pair picked that number. And the stairs and the halls squeak in that dog-gone hotel like accordions all out of tune."

"They do," admitted the sheriff. "They do, for a fact. But what d'you suggest?"

"You notice that there is two windows to that room?"

"I notice that."

"Two men could climb up there—unless they fell down and broke their necks on the way."

"Humph!" said the sheriff. "You boys are kind of bent on takin' chances, ain't you?"

"We got an interest, between you and me," replied O'Shay with apparent frankness. "What I suggest is that you go around to the front entrance and go in there and pick up a couple of loafers that can shoot straight. Then you go up to the top of the stairs on the third story and block the way. Just sit there easy and comfortable, because I got an idea that the two gents might come stampedin' down that way."

"Hold on," muttered the sheriff. "You say these two are hard nuts?"

"They are."

"And apt to be watchful?"

"Is a wolf watchful that's had its tail stepped on?"

"I'd like to point out that the pair of you are aiming at climbing up there and getting into a cage where there's a pair of lions. How d'you aim to drive them out?"

"We got to take a chance," said O'Shay.

"It's only two to two."

"It ain't," replied O'Shay. "I'm one, and me boy friend here is five."

The sheriff paused; then he chuckled and patted O'Shay on the shoulder, reaching high for that purpose.

"Go try your trick," said he. "I'll foller orders, and I wish you luck. If I had a few like you in my county, I'd make crime so unpopular that the crooks would hunt for the pole sooner than this neck of the woods!"

He went off down the alleyway beside the hotel, and O'Shay muttered: "There's a man, Johnnie. The best ones are the ones always that'll listen to sense. Can we climb that wall?"

"We can."

"Then here we go!"

He dropped an enormous hand on the shoulder of Templar, and that touch was all the farewell that passed between them; after that, they bent themselves to the serious work of mounting the wall.

For the vast bulk of O'Shay it was hard enough, but Templar, with fingers of steel and muscles like powerful springs, climbed catlike and swift, finding a fingerhold wherever there was a crevice in the masonry.

He had the projecting casings of windows to help him, and then a heavy drainage pipe that slanted down the side of the wall from the gutter of the roof above. Up this he went hand over hand, helping himself with his feet where he could, until he came to the second story. There, shifting his grasp, his fingers fell on a greasy section of the pipe, and his right hand lost hold at once.

He swung by the left only, and even the fingers of that hand seemed slipping.

One wild glance he cast downward, and saw big O'Shay far, far below, making slow progress; then his left hand slipped clear.

A fall meant death, or, at least, shattered bones through all his body, but he had marked the outthrusting case of a window just beneath him and hardly three feet down. He reached for it, gripped it hard as he fell past, and when the full weight of his body jerked down, his fingers slipped only a little.

He hung at the full stretch of his arms, waiting for his heart to stop racing, and his nerves to steady; then he swung himself up again, catlike, making sure of his hold at every move. He regained the drain pipe, testing every grip before he trusted to it, reached beyond the oiled surface and climbed past it to the level of the top-story windows.

There all immediate difficulties ceased.

As though frightened by the height to which his building had risen, the architect here had set the wall in, and there was a safe ledge more than two feet deep beneath the windows of that floor. Down that ledge he worked toward the lighted squares of the two windows, and when he reached them, he paused and leaned over to see O'Shay.

The latter was invisible at first; but at length he was in sight, having gained the first story and paused there as though to breathe.

When Templar had made sure of this, and knew that there were still long moments of waiting before O'Shay could possibly arrive, he set carefully about investigating the interior of the chamber.

It would not have been so difficult if the windows had been closed, for then he could have ventured to peer through the rain-clouded glass with little danger of being observed from within. But both windows were half open in spite of the darkness and the cold damp of the air. It made his task more difficult if he wished to spy on the occupants of the room, but also it enabled him to see clearly, if he could see at all.

He crouched to his knees, slowly ventured a glance around the lower corner of the sill—and found himself looking straight up into the face of Hong Kong!

The shock of that sudden meeting almost made him lose his hold, almost made him cry out, but he set his teeth and so kept his nerves steady.

She was standing at the window, staring out at the gray mist of the night, and the lights of the village, no doubt, as they streaked down the slope of the hill. Then, not daring to stir for fear her glance should fall on him, he made out that there was a wide sombrero, pushed far back, on her head, and the glistening black braid of her pigtail curved over her shoulder.

O'Shay was right. Even then Templar had time to wonder at the cleverness of the big fellow who had seen through so much. He began to feel a vague certainty that, whether he could understand this trail or not, O'Shay would understand, and so bring him on to the goal.

There was a sharp exclamation from a man; the girl stepped back from the window.

After that, as his ear grew more accustomed to the sound of dripping water, and the hushing of the wind, Templar could make out the noises within the room with greater clearness. They were both there—at least, he heard two men speaking.

They were playing blackjack, and the conversation was simply: "Give me another—another—hit me again—that's enough!"

Or a deeper voice would say: "I'll try another—and another—that's enough to break me!"

He pressed a little closer, still; raised his head; and now he could look slantwise across the room.

Hong Kong had retired to a cot at the farther end of the chamber, and there she sat with her chin resting on her fist, and her slant black eyes regarding infinite distance, infinite sorrow.

Between the window and the cot was a small table, and at this the two men sat, their profiles turned to him; instantly he recognized the pair whom he had seen in the mirror at the Last Luck restaurant.

Now that he could study them more closely, however, he found that there was much to read in their faces. The larger man appeared older than his companion, perhaps because of a white tuft of hair at his temples. He possessed a certain dignity, as well, and it seemed to Templar that this was the sternest face he ever had looked on. A perpetual frown made a pucker between his eyes, but whether it was an expression of pain or of determination was hard to tell.

The smaller of the pair was likewise the less attractive. He looked young enough, and yet something about his eyes made Templar guess him to be forty, at least. But his face was perfectly smooth; there was not a wrinkle about the mouth; he had every attribute of youth except warmth. And, in truth, he was as cold as something cut from steel.

Templar remembered what the sheriff had said. Fifteen years in prison made men either brittle or hard as chilled steel; and there was no doubt what it had meant to this pair. Never had he seen two more dangerous men,

and most ardently he wished that the wise O'Shay might come quickly to his side.

"Are you tired of it yet?" asked the bigger of the two players.

"I'll try you again."

"Don't be a fool."

"I know what I'm doing."

They played; the smaller lost.

"You see," said the big fellow, "luck doesn't go with brains, McArdle!"

McArdle! It rang a bell in Templar's memory. Somewhere before he had heard of it—aye, in the newspaper clipping which was found in Snyder's dead hand!

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### WITH WHAT DOES LUCK GO?

HE remembered, also, what O'Shay had said: that the trails might begin to run together, and, in following one, they might be following many.

"Luck goes with what, then?" snapped McArdle.

"With the man who doesn't care to win."

"*You* don't want to win?" demanded the smaller man aggressively.

"What do you think?" asked the other, and smiled faintly and without mirth.

McArdle cast a single upward glance on him and then suddenly busied himself with the shuffling of the cards.

"I dunno—I dunno!" he answered, and began to scowl.

It seemed to Templar that the superiority of the larger of the pair was not a mere matter of size.

"We'd better stop," he insisted.

"Why stop, why stop? If I got money to lose, ain't you good enough to take the coin?"

"I don't want your money, McArdle. You know that."

"Oh, you're a queer one!" said McArdle, and he shoved back his chair in sudden disgust.

He began to look out the window, drumming his fingers rapidly on the table; but Templar did not withdraw his head, for he knew that those angry eyes were seeing their own thoughts alone.

The larger man in the room, regardless of his friend's anger, shuffled the cards, and began to lay out a hand of Patience.

"Will you listen to me?" said McArdle.

There was no answer.

"Will you listen to me, Crane?" barked McArdle savagely.

And he struck the table with his hand so that the cards jumped, and their piles became confused.

Templar had been waiting, straining for the name, as it were, and now that it came, it rang a second bell deep in his mind. McArdle—Crane—those were two of the names mentioned in the list which that newspaper clipping contained. There was a third one whose name began with Laurence——

And then the door shut, as it were; for had not the man he killed at the Condon house been referred to as Larry? They were the gang. They were three of the gang who, fifteen years before, had committed a railroad robbery and had been sent to prison for their offense. Now one of their trio was dead. Here sat McArdle and Crane. Crane, Templar remembered, had been the respectable member of a community—a storekeeper, or some such thing!

He was something more than a storekeeper, now. He was what the sheriff had called hammered steel; he was stuff of which sword blades might be made. Aye, he would surely take an edge!

Crane turned to the girl and pointed first to her and then to the stove. She rose without a word and filled the

stove with wood, shook down the ashes and arranged the drafts. Then she stood with an impassive face until the flame began to roar, after which she arranged the drafts again and returned to her cot.

"I'll listen to you, McArdle," replied Crane. "What have you to say?"

"Oh, you're polite," sneered McArdle. "Oh, you're very polite! But I tell you again, it's got to be done!"

Crane pointed to the door, and the girl rose again, but McArdle said:

"Aw, let her stay, let her stay. She ain't gunna find out anything new. Say, Crane, the way you treat her makes me sick. You'd think she didn't know nothing. I tell you, she knows everything. There ain't a thing that she don't know. She—she's a sweetie!" said McArdle, and he turned on the Chinese girl with a grin of such wolfish cruelty and suspicion and hatred that Templar winced in his cold, wet place on the ledge.

He became aware that the wind was rising; that his hands were beginning to swell and get hot, so terrible had been the strain on the tendons as he climbed the wall of the house. Certainly they would not be fitted to do justice to his skill with guns, if this affair should turn into a battle.

"Aw, I dunno," went on McArdle. "Maybe you'll run the whole show yourself, but I say, they're poison. They're both poison!"

"The young fellow's a fool," declared Crane. "If you stop to think a little, you'll see that I'm right."

"He a fool?" echoed McArdle. "Then I wish he'd lend me some of his foolishness! If I could shoot like that, I tell you that I'd——"

"You'd be hanged in six months," said Crane, "whereas now you have a chance of living out the year, perhaps!"

McArdle's upper lip curled; his head sank between his shoulders. He looked half snake about to strike, half wild dog about to leap. But Crane endured this glare with perfect composure and rearranged his stacks of cards for Patience with care and attention.

To Templar, watching with fascinated gaze, it appeared that the card player had his aggressive opponent in his hand at all moments. McArdle might often snarl, but he would never bite.

"The big man is different," went on Crane. "I admit that O'Shay is different!"

And again the bell of recognition was rung for Templar. O'Shay was 'different;' then he, in person, must be the 'young fool.' He bit his lip and flushed. There were few men in this world much more proud than he; and he was only twenty-one. Yet his closest friend, O'Shay in person, had half seriously told him he was incapable of thinking, and here was further confirmation from men who, it appeared, were in the camp of the enemy.

"O'Shay *is* different!" agreed McArdle violently. "He's poison, that's what he is!"

"In the first place," said Crane, beginning to play his hand, "I don't think that they have it."

"Maybe they haven't—maybe they haven't. But if they haven't got it, they've got us. Or they soon will, if they keep on our heels. What do they know about us? What started them after us?" exclaimed McArdle, starting up and beginning to pace the room. "What they got in mind?"

"They're bluffing," decided Crane. "They don't know. But they're guessing, and O'Shay is a clever man."

"And a fighter," added McArdle.

"McArdle," said Crane.

"Well?"

"As you say, O'Shay is dangerous, but let me tell you that if we ever come to grips, Templar is the man to watch.

Oh, watch him carefully if you love your life!"

"You know that much, do you?" asked McArdle, and he moistened his lips. "Well, you got some sense. It was him that killed poor Larry, and he ain't finished, I got a feeling. He ain't finished!"

Sweet are compliments from our foes; Templar turned red with pleasure.

McArdle leaned across the table and planted the point of a forefinger on a card, as though it were an all-important one.

"We gotta finish them!" he said.

"You mean murder, McArdle," said Crane, "but you always forget that I'm not a murderer!"

A veritable shudder of rage and hate convulsed McArdle, but then he controlled himself.

"You used to talk business in the pen," he said. "Nothing would ever stop you, you swore!"

"Nothing that's crooked, McArdle," said the other, "but I have a peculiar sympathy for honest men. You don't understand? I can't expect you to understand, I suppose!"

All acid, all biting acid were these words of his, and Templar wondered why the smaller man did not draw one of the weapons which bulged beneath his coat and attack his companion; but the supremacy of Crane was absolute.

"Then if you're gunna let them wander loose behind us," urged McArdle, "let's not waste time here. Let's get out on our hosses and ride!"

"Our horses are tired out."

"Kill them off, then, and buy new ones. Or use our legs!"

"There's no such hurry," Crane assured him. "He doesn't know he's followed. He thinks that he can't be followed, because human wits can't penetrate often through such cleverness as his."

"No," said McArdle, much impressed by some thought, "no, you're right. I give you credit for that; you read the book. I never would've dreamed it. Only, old man," he went on, quite subdued by the reflection which his companion had suggested, "we dunno that we're on the right trail. We can't be sure."

"I *am* sure," said Crane. "I worked it out once, and I'm sure again. In the old days, that was where he went in the pinch, and that's where he'll go once more to disappear. You'll find that he's in Tolman." He added gravely, "I'm as sure of it as though I saw him there, and the two of us walking in on him, McArdle——"

He spoke like one prophesying, his eyes half shut; and McArdle, staring wildly and hungrily, listened, and stretched out his hands, and seemed to throttle the empty air.

"Wait, wait!" whispered McArdle. "When that day comes!"

"It will come."

"I believe you!" said the smaller man, his breast heaving. "I ain't going to make any more trouble for you. You got the brains. I'm just a pair of hands for you to use. It ain't the money that I want. It ain't that, old-timer. It's him! I want him! I want to get at him! I just want to lay hands on him!"

The words came bubbling rapidly from his lips, and he shook with a terrible delight at the thought of the pleasure that was coming to him.

Crane, in the meantime, had risen and held up his hand.

"Go on, say it!" urged McArdle.

"People are slipping up the stairs to the hall on this floor," said Crane in the same quiet voice.

McArdle, gaping, stared at the other; then he whirled on the girl.

"You!" he said.

But Hong Kong, chin on fist, regarded him calmly, dispassionately.

There was no more understanding in her eyes than in two small pools of darkness.

"Put out the light," said Crane in the same quiet tone.

And then Templar slipped through the window and stood with them in the room.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### LET'S START!

"HERE comes Christmas," said McArdle, turning a sickly yellow green. "Here comes Papa Santa Claus! If it ain't Mr. Templar himself!"

"Crowd yourselves together," suggested Templar. "Get closer, friends. I want to have you both under one gun. You, Hong Kong," he called to the girl, "stay back there in the corner."

"Ah," said the girl, with a frightened smile, "you know Hong Kong!"

In the hall there was an approaching stir of feet, and Crane, who had kept his poise perfectly at first, glanced wildly toward the door, toward the window, and then fixed his desperate eye on Templar.

"Crane," cautioned the latter, "I don't want to trouble you. I don't want to threaten. I only have to tell you that I'm watching hard all the time. And—keep away from that lamp!"

For McArdle had attempted a covert backward motion toward the table.

"I have you both in mind," said Templar. "I don't want to shoot, but if I have to, I'll shoot to kill!"

A heavy, panting voice broke in from the window: "Good boy, Johnnie! You got 'em all lined up like little soldiers! Oh, my, it's a pretty picture!"

The two participants in the pretty picture looked hopelessly at the window; there was a soft snarl from McArdle, who looked ready to spring, but Crane said quietly: "Not a move, Mac. We'll take what's coming. And, first of all, we'll find out what's in the air. You haven't come here to rob us, Templar. Then what's your game with us?"

"Rest," said Templar with a grin. "I think that you need to rest, Mr. Crane. We suggest a long period of repose for you. Regular hours, and not too much exercise. Don't you agree?" O'Shay stood inside the window.

"Face the wall," said Danny O'Shay, "Line up agin' the wall and stick your hands behind your back. No tricks, boys. We don't know you, but we figure that you're poison!"

They turned obediently to the wall, and then the big man secured their wrists behind their backs.

"You haven't met 'em," said Templar. "This is Crane, and this is McArdle, ex-railroad robbers. Have you ever heard of them before?"

O'Shay, with the broadest of smiles, patted the shoulders of his prisoners.

"All trails begin to lead to Rome," said he with unexpected erudition. "Open the door, kid, and ask the sheriff in."

The door was opened by Templar, accordingly, and the sheriff stumbled into the room at the head of half a dozen men. He came guns in hand, and those behind him were armed to the teeth, also; it was apparent the sheriff was not taking chances in this matter.

He regarded the scene of the hold-up with great satisfaction.

"This here," he remarked, "is something that I sure hoped for, but I dunno that I ever expected to see it. I thought there was gunna be some shooting, boys. And dog-gone me, how I do hate that! But maybe they ain't mavericks at all. They're just poor old broke-down broncs!"

"You're an officer of the law?" asked Crane politely.

"It looks it," said the sheriff, grinning as he responded.

"And I am under arrest?"

"It looks like that, too."

"Then I have the right to know what charge is against me."

"The judge'll tell you that, me son."

"I think you had better tell me in the first place," said Crane. "I know the law, sheriff, and I intend to have it."

"Why, for a jailbird," said the impolitic sheriff, "you got a free an' easy way of talk!"

"I *am* a jailbird," answered Crane with perfect composure, perfect dignity. "I have served out my time for a crime I did not commit. However, that isn't to the point. Now I'm a free man, and if you attempt to bully me, sheriff, the tropics will be cold, compared to the heat which I shall raise in this county."

This he said without raising his voice, and his calmness gave his words a certain cutting edge that made the sheriff roll his eyes uncertainly.

"We got a charge against you," he said, mustering his righteous anger again. "We got a charge of smuggling chinks against you, and we're gunna see that charge through. Where's the —hey, partner, where's the girl?"

"She's here," began Templar, and then checked himself with a start.

She was not there. Hong Kong had vanished down the hall of the hotel, or out of the window; either might have been possible in the confusion which had followed the entrance of the sheriff and his corps, when all attention was focused so strictly upon the two arrested men. Templar leaped to the window and glanced down. The rain was falling fast, hanging a solid gray curtain before the light of each room, and the wall looked as dangerous as a cliff; and yet he knew, suddenly, that Hong Kong would have ventured even that danger if the humor moved her. Or she might have slipped down the creaking boards of that hall and made them soundless under her flying feet. There was magic in her; of that he was sure.

"Where is she?" asked the sheriff, his anger beginning to rise. "You ain't got the men and let the testimony go, have you?"

"Will you send out your men, and we can talk it all over?" requested Templar.

The sheriff agreeably waved his followers from the room, and the hall outside boomed and creaked under the pounding of their heels.

"Now," said O'Shay, "tell us frankly: Can you hold these men for twenty-four hours without testimony against them?"

"I've done it," the sheriff admitted. "I've done it a good many times with greasers, or such. But I hate to do it with—him!"

He waved his forefinger at Crane.

"He'd know how to make trouble!" he declared.

"You," said O'Shay, turning on Crane and stepping a little nearer, so that the greatness of his bulk might be more imposing at close hand—"you, my friend, have been running a chink girl up through the country——"

"I deny it," answered Crane.

"In man's clothes," went on O'Shay. "I guess that's a crime, sheriff?"

"The person to whom you refer," said Crane, "arrived at the hotel half an hour after us. I think that's enough to settle the talk. The hotel keeper will be able to prove my point for me."

"Cool, calm, an' happy is what he is," said the sheriff.

He scratched his head.

"I dunno what to do about it," said he. "I think that they're guilty. I want to hold 'em. I *will* hold 'em, if

you give me half a handle to grab 'em by!"

"You were shot at through the window," said O'Shay to his friend. "Of course, that was the man who tried the trick!"

He pointed to McArdle, and the latter crimsoned with anger.

"That's such a lie," he declared, "that's got a green beard. I never shot through a window at anybody in my life."

"I was shot at through the window of my room at the farm just up the road," declared Templar, "and I think that's the man."

"You do?" grinned the sheriff. "I'm mighty glad to hear it."

"And does that leave me free?" asked Crane, as quiet as ever.

O'Shay added instantly: "We accuse him of conspiracy in tryin' that murder, sheriff. There's a charge and a half for you!"

"I can prove," said Crane, "that I haven't left this hotel since I first entered it."

"What about it?" asked the anxious sheriff.

"Conspiracy," said O'Shay, seeming to grow hot, "agin' the life and liberty of a citizen of the United States, and if that ain't a charge, I don't know what is!"

"There isn't the substance of a spider's web in that charge," said Crane, "and I'll prove——"

"The sheriff isn't going to let you stand here and talk all the night through," suggested O'Shay. "Take your medicine like a man, Crane. You know you're guilty!"

"I know——" began Crane.

"It's a good charge—it's a fine charge," declared the sheriff. "And we'll rake in the girl, later. It's as good a charge as I ever heard. You boys march through the door—wait till I tie you together. I got a couple of beds waiting for you in the jail. They'll make you comfortable, and you can talk to the judge next Tuesday, maybe!"

There was a yell of rage from McArdle, but his taller companion said quietly: "We'll have a writ of habeas corpus to-morrow. There is a law in the land, and I know the points of it! Come along. Don't make any noise until there's something to be gained by it."

Under this persuasion, the pair faced toward the door, and the sheriff made a wry face at O'Shay and Templar.

"You've given me a handful," he whispered, "but I'm gunna bluff it through."

"Watch your jail to-night," warned O'Shay. "And good luck, sheriff!"

"I'll get your testimony in the morning, when the row begins?"

"Of course," said O'Shay breezily.

So the sheriff disappeared, far from a happy figure. When the door closed on him, Templar turned angrily to his companion.

"We can't wait here till to-morrow to give evidence," said he. "We've got to ride, and we've got to ride this same night. You hear?"

"Old son," grinned O'Shay, "I never figured on staying. Neither does Crane, if he can work through the walls of that jail. Only—if we ain't got him to lead us, I'm wondering just where we'll be riding so fast, Johnnie?"

"Did you ever hear of a place called Tolman?"

"I know it like a book!"

"Then that's where we're heading, because that's where I heard them say that they're going—the pair of them. Tolman is our riding point, old man! That's where *he* is."

"He who?"

The murderer of Snyder; the murderer of Condon; the crook who has the five million. Danny, let's start!"

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### ON THE TRAIL.

HONG KONG was gone; Crane and McArdle were secured in the jail; vaguely O'Shay and Templar felt that he whom they sought was in Tolman. So they prepared to journey in that direction as fast as they could. O'Shay, far from easy, now, exhibited every sign of worry. For Crane with his calm demeanor had impressed the big fellow greatly.

He lay, presently, flat on his back on their bed at the house of the farmer, and in gasps and groans he bewailed the steepness of the wall and the slipperiness of the stones. Thrice, he said, he had hung by the tips of his nails.

"If I'd cut my nails yesterday, I'd be dead to-day," said O'Shay.

Then he turned his attention for a moment to the girl. She had not got out through the door, he was sure. Either she had taken advantage of some hidden door to make her escape, or else, while they were busy with the two men, she had deliberately worked through the window and climbed down to the ground through that downpour of rain.

"Or maybe," exclaimed O'Shay suddenly, "she's lyin' out there now all broke to pieces. That's most likely!"

Templar closed his eyes; then he added, as he banished the picture: "She'd never make a mistake. She has no nerves except the ones she puts on like her clothes and takes off again when they don't suit her!"

O'Shay remained for some moments with his eyes shut tight, his great arms thrown out and projecting far beyond either side of the bed. His chest was rising and falling in enormous spasms, and his fingers twitched so that for Templar the man's prodigious labor in clambering up the wall was reconstructed.

"Beauty!" said O'Shay suddenly.

"Hello?" asked Templar.

"Her," said the giant.

"Who?"

"The beauty! Oh, ain't she a blowed-in-the glass wonder, kid?"

Templar stirred uneasily. It was a subject that he did not like.

"She's got a skin like soap," said the ecstatic giant.

Presently he expanded the pleasant thought. "She's got a skin like yaller laundry soap with the sun shinin' through it."

Templar was still silent.

The giant groaned again.

"Are you sick, Danny?"

"I want no kind words out of you," said the big man in his enormous voice, which flooded through the room and set heavy echoes rumbling. "I want nothing but trouble with you, Johnnie. It's you and the like of you that's ruined the world for the real men. You and the like of you!"

Templar shrank into a corner, and there waited with a grin.

"A skinny little runt," went on O'Shay, pursuing his uncomplimentary description, "with nothin' in his head but trouble, made up of equal parts of gunpowder and fire—you, kid, are the kind that turns the heads of the girls, and leaves no chance for the man-sized men! What have you got to say for yourself?"

"The stand-in that I have with Hong Kong—because I suppose that's what you mean," answered Templar, "is a wonderful thing, Danny. She's tried to poison me, and she's tried to bash in my head with a cleaver."

"Little playful attentions—love taps," grinned the giant. "Johnnie, to speak serious, she's a sort of yaller peril, I'd write her down."

Templar was silent for a moment and then broke out: "Old son, just tell me whether she's white or Chinese!"

"Look at you!" groaned the big

man. "Listen at you, too! Does it make a difference whether a horse is a chestnut or a roan, so long as he covers the ground and has an easy gait? And if the insides of a hoss counts more than the outsides, ain't it true of a woman? Ain't she got more insides than outsides? Here you are up agin' a dog-gone immortal soul, and you ask me is she white or yaller! Which you're plumb disgustin' at times, kid!"

"If she's a chink," said young Templar, his brow creased with intense thought, "she may have murdered Condon—she may even have murdered Snyder! If she's white—of course, that's a different matter!"

"Wrong ag'in," announced O'Shay. "If she's a chink, as she looks, most likely she's follerin' around on this trail because the poor girl is busting her heart over some man or other. If she's white, she's a dog-gone dangerous white, able to play a part, sneakin', two-faced, poisonous! You gotta stop dreamin', kid, and try to think. Work your brain harder and your feet less!"

Suddenly he said in a changed tone: "Crane—there's a man, kid!"

"He is," admitted Templar. "He's all wool." He added: "And it's a low trick that we've played on him, Danny! He'll stay in that jail with his work spoiled, whatever it may be!"

O'Shay grunted.

"He'll stay in that jail not half the night, or I'm a liar," said he. "Jails ain't made in this neck of the woods to hold boys like Crane. He'll just sort of melt out of that jail, son, like a hot bullet through a pot of butter."

"Then we ought to hit the trail!" cried Templar.

"Why am I lyin' here and groanin' some of the wrinkles out of my mind?" asked O'Shay. "Why am I stretched out here like a dog-gone coyote skin dryin' in the sun? So's I can freshen up for a long ride, me boy. Go down and tell the old man to lay out the chuck. We eat, pay, and run for Tolman, and a rough trail we got ahead of us!"

They followed that schedule exactly. The farmer's wife, her eyes small and bright with curiosity, served them on the kitchen table; then they paid for food and lodging and damages and went to their horses, which they found lying down. In five minutes they were pulling up the slippery mud of the main street of the town.

At the sheriff's house they branched to the left and soon were sunk in the wilderness of the mountains. A good road led them, however; the rain had stopped, and patches of stars shone feebly from time to time, so that they pushed steadily on through the hours. Very late the moon rose, and as it stood white and big at the side of a mountain, O'Shay stopped his horse.

"This is where Crane makes his break," he said. "Whatever it is that he wants in Holman, he thinks that we're on the way to be there before him, and the rising of this here moon is gunna drive him almost mad, Johnnie. Mind you, in another few minutes he'll be driving out from the town, and most likely he'll have fresher horses than ours and a better knowledge of the trail."

He chuckled softly.

"What a game! What a game!" murmured O'Shay, and urged his horse forward again.

Under the moon they could see the ranges clearly enough. They were on a ridge intermediate between two loftier ones both east and west, and O'Shay pointed out that Tolman lay over the eastern summits in a wild hole-in-the-wall country. The ideal place for one to go who wished to skip out of the ken of man for a time!

The sun rose on two very tired travelers and two utterly spent horses as O'Shay turned down into the valley

which lay under the great eastern summit. Horses never could cover the miles of cliffs, ice, and snow which towered there above timberline; so they left their mounts at a small shack which they blundered across, where the owner, looking half hermit and half hunter, promised to take good care of the animals until the travelers returned.

He offered them breakfast of cold pone and coffee that tasted like black lye. Then they stretched themselves on the floor of the shack and slumbered heavily in their clothes for several hours.

Then they started on, and climbed through half a mile of stunted trees until they came to the wild frontier of timberline where the indomitable pioneers of the forest maintained a terrible life in the face of wind and cold. Far to right and left they saw the long dark line stretched out, the forest like a shadow beneath, and the barren highlands above. Then they braced themselves for the crossing. It was not a wide range at this point, but they were forced to keep to the most difficult going because in the hollows between the peaks the snows were buried a hundred feet deep by the last storm; so they made slow progress, their breath growing scant with the thin air, their heads dizzy with altitude and labor.

A head wind, they felt, would have turned them back, but, luckily, the only currents of air were from due north, and though their force freshened each moment, still it was not until they were over the worst of the divide that the storm came. They had before them a series of long, white slopes, tumbling smoothly one into the other; the dark forests began, then, and these dipped into many hollow valleys. Far and wide to the east lay a broken region chopped with many gorges in which the water flashed far off and faintly, like gleams of blue light.

This was the hole-in-the-wall region of which O'Shay had spoken, and Templar appreciated its points and difficulties at once. Even a fool might hide himself here from wise men, and certainly he on whose trail they journeyed was far from a fool!

"Trouble's popping up north," said O'Shay suddenly. "Start moving, boy!"

They hurried on with all their might. To the north they saw a bluish haze which advanced with seeming slowness until they noticed how it trampled out of sight peaks and ranges to the northward; then premonitory gusts began to dash at them and send up great mists and flurries of the dry, newly fallen snow. Every moment those gusts became more frequent; the bluish haze seemed to be lifting in the north; they could see far and wide, and then the cold wash of the storm closed over them and bit them to the bone.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### STORM AND STRESS.

THEY had hardly two hundred yards to make to the timberline beneath, but it seemed to Templar that they must perish before they gained that meager shelter. He was numb below the hips; his legs worked only by a conscious effort, and he had to flex each knee with individual attention. Black spots were dancing before his eyes, and his thoughts whirled in a strange, giddy fashion.

The wind was increasing to a scream; about them rushed a blast filled with snow particles that blazed like streams of white fire with the sun which shone with such mocking brightness from above. He was aware of O'Shay, like a fabulous white monster, beckoning to him and standing still. He, Templar, struggled with all his might, but though his legs went up and down, he could not advance an inch.

O'Shay came back. His breath was a cloud of steam. Something he shouted, and suddenly swung Templar across his shoulder like a log of wood, and so went blundering and floundering along through the snow, leaning far to one side against the blast of the storm.

The whiteness vanished before them; they lay now side by side in the verge of timberline with a stunted tangle of trees defending them while they dropped their heads and regained their breath.

By the time they had recovered a little they had before them a strange and mighty spectacle, for the wind all this while had been increasing in power, and now it was like a flood that has burst from a lofty dam. In the cold of the northern polar regions, perhaps, that mighty tide of air had its roots, and now it whiplashed across the mountains with gathering impetus. The vast piles of dry, heaped, accumulated snows had their crusted surfaces worn away and chiseled off, and then the whole masses began to be thrown into motion by the gale. By the shoulders and at the heads of the peaks, delicate white streamers appeared for a flashing instant before they were jerked down, as it were. Then wider flags were tossed on the sea of wind and, finally, from the top of every crest, from every minor peak and towering giant the enormous flags of translucent, crystal snow were blowing, stretching out, tearing off at the edges and letting loose streamers dart across the sky. The sun played gloriously over it all, showering rainbow colors in masses, and turning the shadows beneath those trembling white flags to a most unearthly purple. Even in silence, it would have been such a scene as makes all the battles of man as nothing, but it was not silent.

Every small ravine whistled like a piercing flute, and through the staggering forest moans and whinings as of violins kept growing, while the larger canyons, the hollows, the big valleys, roared each with a separate note, and through all some master demon of the wind strode up and down with footfalls that clanged terribly on the heights and boomed like the fall of avalanches in the valleys.

They watched that magnificent display and then turned to one another with a common thought. Not until they were well below in the shelter of the woods could they speak with any ease, and then Templar asked at once: "Do you think he would be caught in it?"

"I don't know," said the giant. "But if he was——"

His face hardened; then he shrugged his shoulders.

"There are ways of living out storms like that. We're not mountaineers, but Crane probably would know. A fellow like him knows nearly everything," he added with an air of deep respect. "Because he's had fifteen years of silence to do all his thinking in. Kid, when we rub against him again, we're going to lose some skin!"

As they descended, the turmoil behind them grew less and less; finally, they came out on the side of a river that stormed down a narrow ravine, filling it with dashings and white lightning in the sun. O'Shay, after a moment's hesitation, turned down the course of the canyon, and they made good time until midafternoon. Then their companion river emptied into a greater stream; there was a widening valley garbed in black forest on either side, and looking down this valley, they saw a small blur of distant houses.

"That's Tolman," said O'Shay. "It gives me a chill, kid, to look at it, because there or somewhere near there we're going to find the end of this here trail, as I think."

Templar thought so as well, but he

said nothing, merely narrowing his eyes a little, and they strode on side by side, glad of the easier going underfoot. Before evening, in the golden time of the afternoon, they came to Tolman.

Templar was for putting up at some house near the village or else for living in the woods on what game they could shoot; but O'Shay vetoed that suggestion, for, as he said, the people of Tolman were used to strangers who arrived on foot after a long trek, and no questions would be asked.

Besides, they must now strive to pick up the trail itself; hitherto they had been toiling simply in a general direction, so to speak. There was ample chance that the quarry would be warned if the quarry were really some person other than Crane or McArdle. At any rate, they would have a chance to ensconce themselves before those two travelers arrived, and if they could watch the two, out of their actions, they might be led to the goal.

O'Shay, as usual, prevailed, and they went on into the town. Tolman was a place which, when not actually storm bound, seemed perpetually just recovering from a storm, or immediately after a thaw. Patches of dirty snow lay on the northern sides of houses, the streets were washed by little runlets which had cut through surface dust and gravel to rock beneath, or to hard clay. The roofs were built with a great overhang, like Swiss cottages, and the walls were braced outside with heavy cross timbers. So it was plain that even the tall woods which came to the edge of the village were slight protection against the great mountain winds that swept down the valley, like water crowded into a funnel. The weight of those battering winds seemed scarcely taken from Tolman; it seemed still crushed, like a ship dripping and uncertain after a heavy squall.

Its people were oddly in contrast with their town, for they went about the streets singing; they paused to admire half a dozen sleek cows driven home to be milked; they chattered noisily from open doors and windows, and the air was enriched by the fragrance of suppers cooking in every kitchen.

"Down in the desert or up here, they all gotta do the same, philosophized the great O'Shay. "All gotta cook the three squares a day; all gotta work for rent and clothes; and between working and sleeping and complainin', how much time we got for livin', kid? Look here at these folks. Live in a kind of fog, but they've all made up their minds that they're gunna close their eyes agin' the facts and be cheerful. What're you gunna do, kid? Laugh at 'em for bein' blind, or praise 'em for bein' happy? Why, it looks to us like they was livin' in the middle of winter, but that's what we're all doin'. Livin' in the middle of winter, and tryin' to call it summer to ourselves. It takes a gent from the outside to see the truth!"

They paused to watch a six-horse team pulling a heavy wagon laden with beer barrels; rolling violently over a deep rut, the wagon lurched, and a barrel staggered, then crashed to the ground.

Instantly a chorus of sympathetic voices warned the driver to slam on his brakes, and a swarm of helpers poured out to assist him in working the barrel back into the wagon. The teamster, short, burly, powerful, a dark man with beetling brows, warned the crowd back with a huge bass voice.

"Keep your hands off for a minute," said he. "It ain't any use milling around like this here. You gotta take time. You gotta think."

Templar grinned at his companion.

"Like you, big boy," said he.

"He's got the look of a worth-while

citizen," replied O'Shay, unabashed. "If he ain't a thug or an ex-prize fighter like Snyder, he's a pretty good fellow!"

Finally, under the directions of the teamster, several stout men grasped the barrel and heaved it up, but they failed in proper unison of effort, and the barrel slipped suddenly from their grasp. They tried again and yet again, always with less and less success because plainly they had become afraid of getting too closely under the heavy barrel, lest it fall and crush their feet. The wagoner was beginning to grow profane when O'Shay strode through the puzzled crowd, where every man now was giving advice. Some favored passing two boards under the barrel, so that more persons could lift with an easy purchase, and others were for making an inclined plane so that the barrel might be rolled up to the rest of the load.

O'Shay settled all of these argument by leaning and grappling both ends of the barrel in his mighty hands.

There was a burst of laughter, followed by an equally sudden burst of seriousness.

"He means to try."

"He looks near big enough to do it!"

"You fool, no man could lift that, unless he was a horse!"

So they commented in murmurs, and the teamster stood by with ironical encouragement.

"Take a good hold, me lad," said he. "Bend your back to it, and get it up right. It's all in the knack. Now, heave!"

O'Shay actually raised the barrel to above his knees, when one end of it slipped down, and the barrel crashed back into the mud. A groan of sympathy from the crowd applauded this great effort.

"Try again," said the teamster, still unmoved. "Nobody else in the world could get that barrel up to the wagon, but maybe you're the man."

O'Shay spat upon his hands, rubbed them together, flexed his knees, and then took a great breath and laid hold again.

This time he went about it more slowly; the barrel rose slowly to his knees. Half squatting, he rested it there for a moment, the vast burden driving his shoes almost ankle deep into the mud; then he rolled it up the inclined plane of his thighs until it was jammed against his stomach. Then one heave of legs, arms, shoulders, and body drove the barrel from him and onto the wagon, where it settled with a smash that threatened to knock the bottom from the vehicle.

There was a loud outcry, but all the noise did not match the wonder of the teamster, who laid a hand upon the trembling shoulder of O'Shay and said quietly:

"You're a *man*. Come drink with me!"

**To be concluded in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.**

# Who Poached on the Poachers

By Ray Humphreys

*Author of "Two Ways to Skin a Cat," etc.*

THERE was a closed season on pheasants in Colorado, to give the beautifully plumaged game birds a chance to increase and multiply, but that hadn't prevented some one, or two or three some ones, around Monte Vista from slaughtering the birds right and left. In vain for weeks had Sheriff Joe Cook and his youthful deputy, "Shorty" McKay, sought the poachers. In vain had the Monte Vista *Clarion* appealed to the sportsmen of the San Luis Valley to put a stop to the illegal killings—the slaughter went right on; farmers were constantly reporting finding dead and wounded pheasants in barnyards and fields, and the birds that had been fairly plentiful in number in the fall were not even seen in the spring. Then came that eventful Wednesday.

The sheriff and Shorty were seated in the sheriff's office, bemoaning their failure to catch the pheasant slayers, when the telephone jingled. The sheriff reached for it with a sad smile.

"Another wounded pheasant found," he predicted.

But this time the old sheriff had guessed wrong.

"Sheriff," said a pleasant voice on the wire, "this is Eddie Owens, secretary of the chamber o' commerce, talkin'. I jus' wanted to tell you about our meetin' last night. We went on record—strong—against this pheasant-killin' business, sheriff."

"Yes?" droned Sheriff Cook sadly.

"Yes, an' the chamber decided to offer a reward o' two hundred and fifty dollars fer the arrest o' the guilty party or parties, with this proviso, that the reward be paid only fer the arrest an' conviction o' the party or parties responsible fer the bulk o' the poaching—in other words, we can't pay the reward fer a fellow bein' caught ef he has jus' shot one bird. We want the wholesale killers—see?"

"Yes," said the sheriff, but there was

no enthusiasm in his voice. He mumbled some words of appreciation, however, and hung up.

"Another wounded pheasant?" asked Shorty.

"No," said the sheriff, "that was Owens, o' the chamber o' commerce, sayin' the chamber offers a reward o' two hundred and fifty dollars fer the arrest an' conviction o' the main guy or guys in this bird killin'."

"Two hundred and fifty berries!" said Shorty, and he smacked his lips in anticipation. "I sure needs a new saddle, with a silver horn, an' a pair o' silver spurs, too; I'd like——"

The telephone rang again.

"Yes," said the sheriff, "this is me—*what?*"

The sheriff seemed to listen only a second, then with a snapped "I'll be right over!" he banged the receiver down, and shot a quick look at his wondering deputy.

"Trouble's popped!" said the sheriff tersely, "that was the Monte Vista Hospital callin'. 'Squint' Dennison is over thar—jus' brung in—wounded, shot—an' they think he's gonna die—suggest we gits a dying statement—come on!"

Squint Dennison was one of the big men of Monte Vista. He was a druggist, a leading member of the chamber of commerce, and prominent socially. He was also in a mighty bad way when the panting sheriff and Shorty reached the hospital. He was shot through the right thigh and had suffered a great loss of blood. Weak, and in much pain, Squint managed to gasp out a statement to the sheriff and Shorty, while doctors got ready to operate.

"I was riding along Elk Creek," gasped Dennison, "when all of a sudden I felt a stab o' pain in my thigh. I saw a puff o' smoke a little ways off, near a thicket. I started to ride over thar, thought better o' it, an' swung my hoss around fer town, an' fortunately met Floyd Quinn jus' as I was about to faint from weakness an' pain—an'—an' here I am, boys."

"Didn't see nobody on Elk Creek?"

"Not a soul!"

"Don't suspect nobody in particular?"

"No—I don't."

"Anybody have a grudge agin' yuh, Squint, that——"

"Not that I know of!"

Then they wheeled Squint off to the operating table, where a surgeon was waiting to probe for the bullet and fix up the torn ligaments. The sheriff, with a worried frown, turned to Floyd Quinn, who was nervously pacing the hospital corridor. Floyd and Squint had always been great friends. Floyd told the sheriff practically what Squint had previously told him.

"I was ridin' out to the Hanlon place an' I sees Squint ridin' in, sagged in the saddle; when I gets to him he says he was shot from ambush an' he don't know who did it. I left his hoss at a place near by an' the farmer hitched up a buggy an' brought us in. Doctor Winn examined Squint right off an' said it was a purty bad wound, an' then they sent for the surgeon."

The sheriff nodded.

"Why should any one want to shoot Squint?"

"I don't know," said Floyd, "I kain't figger it!"

"Shorty, supposin' we go an'——" but Sheriff Cook hesitated when he looked around and saw that Shorty was not present. The deputy had disappeared. It was some minutes before the sheriff located Shorty in the hospital reception room, holding a whispered conference with a very pretty little blond nurse. The sheriff grunted, thus breaking up the interview, and Shorty followed his boss out.

"Never did I know yuh to git yuhr mind down to work until driven to it!" exploded the sheriff, after they were

out of the hospital. "I turns around —an' presto! yuh has vanished. I finds yuh chinnin' with a yaller-haired nurse! Now I want to tell yuh that we got serious business ahaid o' us; we ain't goin' to let Squint Dennison git shot an' nobody ketched fer it—not as long as I'm sheriff here."

"He won't kick off," comforted Shorty.

"Who says so, Doctor McKay?" exclaimed the sheriff peevishly. "What did yuh study doctorin'—in the barber colletch to Denver? That man is badly hurt! He may have been accidentally shot—an' ag'in he may not have! It might have been—my gosh, *Shorty!*"

The sheriff stopped dead in his tracks.

"That's what I was thinkin'—mebbe," said Shorty.

"What was yuh thinkin'?"

"What yuh was about to say—that mebbe this here pheasant killer as is runnin' high, wide, an' handsome, shot Squint by accidenthike. Elk Creek usta be full o' pheasants——"

The sheriff controlled himself with difficulty.

"By accident—eh?" he snarled. "Waal, I wasn't goin' to say *that*, Shorty—not by a jugful! I says *by design*—by intention. Ain't Squint vice president o' the chamber o' commerce, an' didn't the chamber offer a reward las' evenin' fer the pheasant killer?"

"Waal," said Shorty, "watch my smoke, boss! I'm gonna git that pheasant killer."

The sheriff held up one hand.

"No, we're goin' to git that feller as shot Squint," he corrected. "Mebbe the pheasant business ain't connected up at all—pheasant killin' ain't nuthin' compared to shootin' Squint."

But neither the sheriff nor Shorty fulfilled their threats. Sheriff Cook didn't get the man who shot Dennison, and Shorty didn't find the pheasant killer, either. Meanwhile, Dennison, in the hospital, grew better. The wound was not so bad, after all, they said. He was weak from loss of blood, of course, and he regained his strength slowly, but the gunshot wound was healing nicely. The surgeon had extracted a rifle bullet from it. Every day Sheriff Cook sauntered over to the hospital, with an anxious look on his grizzled face, and every day the conversation was practically the same.

"How yuh feelin', Squint?"

"Better—thanks."

"Ain't thought o' who might have shot yuh?"

"No—have yuh?"

"No."

"Danged funny!"

"Yep—funny."

The sheriff worked early and late, but he had no luck, and no coöperation from his deputy, either. Shorty had dropped the Dennison shooting like a hot potato, it appeared, and was putting in all his time hunting for the pheasant killers. The fact that the unsolved shooting of Dennison was already beginning to be a blot on the sheriff's official record didn't worry Shorty any. Each time the sheriff remonstrated with him, Shorty grunted.

"I'm out fer that two hundred and fifty dollars—I need it! Reports comin' in from everywhere about dead an' wounded pheasants! Dennison is goin' to pull through, so why worry over him; an' didn't he tell yuh hisself, an' didn't yuh tell me, that he didn't put no stock in that pheasant-killer shootin' him business, eh?"

"Waal—he did say he thought that was a pore theory!"

"Sure! I think it was a stray shot hit Squint, an' mebbe the guy as shot doesn't know it to this day. Waal, then! Why go lookin' fer a needle in a haystack when yuh might find a feller with a two-hundred-and-fifty-dollar re-

ward tacked on his haid, eh? I need that money."

The sheriff was downhearted. He had been doing a great deal of quiet sleuthing on his own hook, hoping to catch the man who had shot Dennison, and show Shorty up—but he had no such good fortune. Dennison had laughed at his theory that the pheasant killer had tried to take revenge for the chamber of commerce reward offer. The town as a whole didn't believe that either. So Sheriff Cook finally discarded that idea, too.

It was about a week after Squint had been shot that Shorty rode in one day with a gunnysack full of dead pheasants. He had found the sack under a culvert on the Twin Peaks Trail, he said. The pheasants had been shot.

"Shorty," said the sheriff wearily, "why won't yuh fergit that two-hundred-and-fifty-dollar reward just long enough to pitch in an' help me clear up this Dennison case? Folks are startin' to laugh at me, an' yuh! I suppose ef Dennison had offered a reward o' two hundred fifty dollars and sixteen cents yuh'd chuck the pheasant business an' go lookin' fer the guy that shot Dennison?"

"Yuh bet," agreed Shorty, "money talks! Why don't yuh suggest to him that he offer a reward o', say, two hundred fifty dollars and five cents, an' then I'll——"

The sheriff sighed. He would make no such suggestion and make himself out a fool or a scamp or incompetent in the eyes of Dennison. This man Dennison was too big to antagonize. So the sheriff kept his mouth shut, followed out his own lines of investigation, and early next morning, as usual, went to the Monte Vista Hospital to see Dennison. But this time the visit was not as monotonous as the previous visits. The sheriff had hardly arrived and seated himself in Dennison's room when there was a rap on the door. The nurse answered the summons. A grimy Mexican boy, some ten or twelve years old, stood there, holding out a beautifully wrapped package. The nurse took it, with a word of thanks.

"What is it?" asked Dennison, curiously.

"I'll open it if you wish," said the girl, and she did. There was a billowy ocean of tissue paper in the box. Then there was an object wrapped in oiled paper. The nurse lifted it out. It was a roasted fowl, on a paper platter.

"A chicken!" exclaimed the nurse, amused.

"A chicken!" cried Sheriff Cook, and his eyes narrowed. "A chicken, my hat! That's a *pheasant!*"

"A pheasant?" asked Dennison in awe.

"A danged pheasant, sure as I sets here!" said the sheriff with certainty. "I've seen pheasants before—before it became illegal to shoot 'em! Miss Nurse, let me see *that* box!"

The girl handed the box to the sheriff, while Dennison's eyes grew wide as saucers. There were no marks on the box, however. The sheriff looked inside. There was an envelope—with the name "Dennison" scrawled on it in big, printed letters. The sheriff fished it out and handed it to the man in bed.

"It's addressed to yuh, Squint," he remarked, "so yuh open it an' read it—an' then let me read it. Ef this ain't the strangest——"

Dennison opened the letter with trembling hands. His eyes widened as he read the typewritten letter. He grew pale.

"Let me see that, Squint, please!"

The sheriff took the paper from Dennison's hands, and read:

DEAR SQUINT: I've heard from several different places that you been cracking wise about me and I want to tell you that I'm through and that I have sure told everything to Shorty, the deputy sheriff, and I am send-

ing you this pheasant, hoping it will choke you, for it is the last pheasant you're going to eat in a long time unless I miss my guess, which isn't often.

The letter was not signed. Sheriff Cook read it over twice, with a puzzled frown on his face. Then he looked up at Dennison and saw his own worries reflected on Dennison's face.

"Who is this from, Squint?"

"I—dunno!"

"Kin yuh guess who might have wrote it?"

"Waal," hesitated Squint unhappily, "I don't think so!"

"We'll git to the bottom o' this in a hurry," said the sheriff, turning to the nurse. "Miss, will yuh go an' telephone my office an' tell Shorty to come up here right this minnit?"

Shorty, it seemed, was there in less than a minute. He bowed to Dennison and then looked questioningly at the sheriff.

"Read that," said the sheriff, handing him the letter.

Shorty read it with a poker face.

"Waal?" he asked, looking up.

"What about it?" asked the sheriff.

"About what?" repeated Shorty.

"Why, dang it, that bird says in his letter that he has told yuh everything about something, an' what I want to know is if that's right and who is he?"

Shorty glanced at Dennison.

"He tol' me all about that pheasant killin'," said Shorty, "he made a clean confession, so that I kin see me collectin' that two-hundred-and-fifty-dollar reward. He tattled—he squawked."

Dennison's eyes dropped suddenly.

"But who is he?" persisted the sheriff, "an' what's the idear o' sendin' a letter like this to Squint, here?"

"He's a friend o' Squint's, he is," said Shorty, slowly, "or was once. He came to me las' night an' said he had heard that Squint had told on him, so that he was goin' to tell on Squint. He said Squint was shot while huntin' pheasants—that Squint was the big pheasant killer we been lookin' for and——"

"Go on!" cried the sheriff, "an' who is the guy said that, Shorty, who tattled?"

The man in the bed suddenly flushed.

"Heck!" he exclaimed, "two kin play at one game, sheriff, I kin tell yuh now who shot me."

"Who?" demanded the sheriff.

"Floyd Quinn!" said Dennison quickly, "the low-down, squealin' fool—that's who! An' he's been killin' pheasants, too! We both been killin' pheasants—we had a bet made last January, afore the restrictions were announced, as to who would shoot the most pheasants this year. We didn't have sense enough to quit when it became illegal, that's all, an' then the other day Floyd shot me as I come out of a thicket with a pheasant I'd shot."

Shorty nodded his head.

"Excuse me a minnit," he said, "I'll be right back."

Then, while Dennison poured out more information to the gasping sheriff, Shorty raced away from the hospital. He was back in less than ten minutes, with Floyd Quinn. He had told Quinn certain things on the way to the hospital.

"Waal, squawker!" exclaimed Dennison hotly.

"Squealed, eh?" answered Quinn.

"Yuh told on me fust, yuh coward!"

"I did not—yuh blabbed fust."

Shorty raised a hand for silence. He looked at Dennison and he looked at Quinn and lastly he looked at the sheriff, who seemed to be stricken dumb.

"Gents," said Shorty, "they'll put us all outta the hospital ef this whoopin' an' yellin' keeps up. I suggests that since yuh, Squint, an' yuh, Floyd, is both guilty o' killin' pheasants out o' season, yuh both plead guilty in court, pay a fine, an' let it go at that. There'll be no more pheasant killin', I'm think-

in', an' I'll get the reward o' two hundred and fifty dollars—an' yuh two kin explain to the jedge why yuh was doin' it. Seein' yuh're both big men he'll probably let yuh off with a light fine and a lecture."

Dennison laughed mirthlessly.

"Yuh got *me*, Shorty," he growled, "an' yuh got this other guy here, too; but I also got *him* fer shootin' me. I'll file charges agin' *him* fer that, sheriff. I'll show him——"

Again Shorty raised a hand.

"All's fair in love an' war," he said, softly, "an' I feels called upon now to confess somethin' myself. I set out to git the pheasant killers, an' I did—but nobody squawked on anybody else, as yuh two think. I suspected yuh, Mr. Dennison, as a poacher from the day yuh was shot. I found out from some ranchers that yuh was not alone the day yuh was shot, but that yuh had a man with yuh. Then I found a sack o' dead pheasants under the culvert, where yuh an' yuhr pal had chucked 'em after the shootin'. The bag bore a shippin' tag addressed to yuhr drug store, Mr. Dennison—an oversight on yuhr part—so I had *yuh* then——"

Shorty paused to grin.

"I went out yesterday an' shot a pheasant myself an' had the chef down to the Elite cook it fer me. It was me sent yuh the bird an' the unsigned letter to-day. While I suspected Floyd here as yuhr huntin' partner, I couldn't prove it. But I figgered yuh might blow up ef I sent yuh the letter, apparently from him, an' had him refer in the letter to me; an' then, me pretendin' I had talked with him, yuh blew up an' named Floyd! Then I run out an' told Floyd yuh had tattled, an' Floyd admitted it an' hurled poachin' charges agin' yuh. I brought yuh face to face an' yuh're both as good as fined right now—with the sheriff, the nurse, an' me as witnesses agin' yuh."

Dennison spoke first.

"Yuh deserve the reward, Shorty," he groaned, "yuh'll git it. No more pheasant killin'. Floyd an' I have been fools. We'll plead guilty——"

"We will!" put in Floyd.

"We'll take our medicine," went on Dennison, "an' as fer me filin' charges over the shootin'—waal, that was all blah. It was accidental, an' I know it. Floyd, will yuh shake?"

They shook—grimly. Their pheasant-shooting contest had finally come to an abrupt end—thanks to Shorty.

But later, in the corridor, Sheriff Cook seized Shorty by the arm. The puzzled look was still on the sheriff's face.

"Shorty," he said, "one thing ain't clear in my mind yet. Yuh told Dennison yuh suspected him from the day he was shot as bein' one o' the pheasant killers—how come yuh to do that?"

"Ef a man without no enemies is shot away out in a barren place whar he doesn't explain what he's doin'," said Shorty, "he might be huntin'."

The sheriff shook his head quickly.

"Shorty, yuh surely had more than that hunch to go on!" he protested. "Yuh spit out the truth——"

"Waal," said Shorty, "I'll whisper it to yuh, boss; when they fust examined Dennison at the hospital here they found a pheasant feather in the wound—see? So I figgered he was holdin' a pheasant close to him, mebbe in his hand, when he was shot. *That's* what I had to go on, an' it was plenty——"

But the sheriff still looked puzzled.

"Doctors are so blamed ethical," he said softly, "I wouldn't think they would've told yuh, Shorty."

"They didn't," said Shorty, "but the little blond nurse did! An' when I git the reward, I gotta buy her a box o' candy, mebbe, or some perfume."

"As long as yuh don't buy her no engagement ring," grunted the sheriff, "I guess I gotta be satisfied, eh?"

"Eh is right!" said Shorty.

# While They Waited For Help

By Harley P. Lathrop

*Author of "Wild Ones," etc.*

ALL Fayette County realized that in time a split was bound to occur between Colonel Sumners and his son, Rod. For the colonel was a transplanted old Southerner, who brought with him when he came to Texas all his deep-rooted convictions. In the order named, he worshiped God, womankind, and thoroughbred horses. Moreover, he was a great stickler for the conventions.

Now Rod was different. He was extremely democratic, cared nothing about the pedigree of a horse provided it would deliver the goods, and was absolutely and totally indifferent to women.

This morning the colonel was angry. He stood on the ranch-house gallery facing his son, his eyes snapping, his white hair ruffled.

"Youah cold-blooded, suh," he was exclaiming, "as cold-blooded as a Yankee or a watah moccasin. Mo'ovah, yo' are most discourteous, and to my mind the essentials of good breedin' are sadly 'lackin' from youah make-up. I sometimes wondah whethah yo' are my son or not!"

Looking at the two as they stood side by side, no one else would have questioned this relationship. For, except that the colonel's hair was white and that he was three decades older than his son, they resembled each other strongly. Both were tall, lean, gray-eyed men, who could, if the occasion warranted, move with a feline grace and quickness. And both were stamped with that indefinable something that proclaims the wearer owns more than the ordinary man's share of courage.

An early sun, filtering down through the moss-draped live oaks surrounding the Sumners ranch house, dazzled the colonel's eyes? He made an impatient gesture as if to brush the rays away, and began afresh.

"Yo' acted downright boorish, suh," he declared with added heat. "Heah I was givin' a dinnah fo' the daughtah of

my oldest friend who has come to Texas to abide, and yo' were absent. Youah chair faced us cold as a tomb and empty as a last yeah's birds' nest. Wheah were yo', suh? Consortin', I have no doubt, with some bunch of rowdies."

Young Rod shifted his feet uneasily which caused his big roweled spurs to give off a musical clinking. "I didn't exactly fo'get the dinner," he explained slowly, "but I thought yo' wouldn't miss me. So I stayed all night at the Bar X Bar. I went over to ride a hoss fo' them yesterday."

The colonel snorted, a sort of gleeful snort as if he were pleased at this confirmation of his surmise. "Yo' are common, suh," he thundered, "fo' yo' slighted the lady I desiah yo' to marry. But I will give yo' one mo' chance. If yo' have the instinct of a gentleman yo' go to her and apologize."

The narrowing of young Rod's eyes gave warning of rising temper. But he spoke calmly, almost too calmly. "It strikes me yo' are a trifle presumptuous, dad," he said. "I don't intend to marry this girl or any other. And so far as apologizing goes, I fail to see why I should, bein' as she's an absolute stranger to me."

Now, Colonel Sumners had nursed an irascible temper until it had obtained the whip hand over his better judgment. Of late years he had said and done many things in the heat of passion that afterward he would have given his right hand to retract. This proved to be another such occasion.

His white mustaches quivered and his hair seemed to stand erect. "Theah's the gate, suh," he thundered, "and just beyond that yo'll find the road!"

"Yo' mean," Rod asked through compressed lips, "yo' want me to go away from heah?"

"If yo' evah attain a lick of sense or learn what good breeding is, youah welcome to come back; but if not, youah equally welcome to stay away," replied the colonel harshly.

Thereupon, having delivered this ultimatum, he swung on one heel and marched stiffly into the house. So he had no last glimpse of this son of his who was so much like him, as he mounted his horse and headed west.

Summer passed and winter and spring had come again when another young saddle rowdy, unrest blazing in his eyes, appeared west of the Pecos. Because of his Texas drawl the men of his outfit nicknamed him "Brazos" and refrained from inquiring further into his antecedents. And because his dexterity with a six-shooter was so great as to be almost uncanny, they bragged about his skill, acclaiming him the premier gunman of the country.

The result was as inevitable as the tides. Brazos, who never yet had shot at a human being, was foredoomed by this careless talk to kill his man. It came about in this manner.

With a young married man of the outfit, Brazos rode into town one day, three months' wages burning in his pocket. And as was only natural, midnight found them, after exhausting all other sources of pleasure that the small place afforded, sitting at a card table in the saloon of a man called "Black Jake."

Now this Black Jake, so called from the color of his hair and mustache, held to some extent the whip hand of the law. So, feeling sure of protection, and being dishonest to the core besides, he had no scruples against robbing his patrons in any way he might. This night he was sitting in the game with these two guests. And thinking from their youthful exuberance that Brazos and his companion were far gone in drink, he attempted some bald-faced cheating.

Detecting this, the pair cashed in their chips and rose from the table. What followed was afterward never quite clear to Brazos. He and his com-

panion were indulging in a parting drink at the bar when Black Jake accosted them in an ugly humor. A short discussion ensued during which Brazos found himself telling the saloon man quietly but in no uncertain terms his opinion of all card sharps.

The termination was exactly what might have been expected—a roar of guns; the tinkle of glass as an ill-aimed bullet caught the mirror; a concerted rush of feet, and an overturning of chairs as the disinterested crowd sought security; winding up with the dying curses of Black Jake as he lay outstretched on his own sawdust-covered floor.

A minute later found Brazos, his pistol still smoking, astride his pony on the opposite side of the street. The chill of the night air merely served to spur the hot flush of fighting blood.

"Yo' drag it home to yore wife and babies," he told his companion quietly. "Me, I aim to stir 'em up once mo', then leave this country pronto."

His comrade loyally protested that he meant to remain, but Brazos had the stronger will. "Yo' go," he hissed, "while the goin's good."

He waited until the clatter of the other's pony had died away down the road and activity began again in Black Jake's place. Sitting erect on his horse, an unmistakable figure in the bright moonlight, he methodically bombarded the saloon until he felt certain all pursuit would be centered on his person. Then, with a shouted taunt to those within, he left in a cloud of dust.

Two weeks later with a half-healed bullet wound in his shoulder as the painful reminder of a long pursuit, Brazos found work in a distant county. There, notwithstanding that the authorities had given up the chase, the fame of his exploit in time caught up with him. And for that reason he was eventually compelled to kill another man who sought notoriety through killing him.

There is one thing to be said about a gunman. Such men are largely the victims of circumstance. Seldom do they kill through sheer lust for slaughter. But with the hand of every one against them, and many seeking the mantle of glory that comes to one who has bested a famous killer, gun fighters are compelled to shoot on the slightest provocation in order to survive.

Brazos had six notches on his pistol before this fact became established in his mind. "I reckon," he mused one day after arriving at this conclusion, "I'd best pull out to where no one ever heard of me, or directly I'll be smellin' smoke again."

So once more Brazos headed west, resolute in the determination to outride his reputation. Then one day during a chance conversation with a stranger he mentioned that he was bound for Arizona.

At this news the stranger's eyes roved searchingly over Brazos' lean form, missing no single detail, from the steel-gray wariness of his eyes to the gun on either hip.

"If you intend to go to punchin' cows out there," he said just before they parted, "look up old man Whipple at Greasewood Flats an' tell him Sandy recommended you. My guess is that you'll find his outfit there entirely to your likin'."

"Thanks," Brazos replied. "If I get that far I'll look him up."

Little did he suspect when six weeks later he applied to Asa Whipple for work that a letter from the stranger had preceded his coming. It contained these words:

If a tall, gray-eyed, black-haired guy who calls himself "Brazos" strikes you for a job, take him on. From what I've learned he's chain lightnin' with a pistol and, judgin' from my talk with him, his nerves are raw. If you can manage to sick him on Wes Ringold, likely Wes'll be out of luck. Anyway, it's worth a trial.

Now there was little about Asa Whipple to impress one in his favor. In fact, the contrary was the case. He was a thin man, with crafty eyes, a catfish mouth, and the furtive, uneasy manner of a cat. His crew, Brazos found, stacked up about the same. They were a shifty-looking set and if surface appearances indicated the true state of affairs, there was not one strictly honest man among them. Brazos had little to do with any of them but went about his duties, aloof almost as a rank outsider.

He had been with the outfit a month when the fall branding took place. This consumed several weeks, during which his employer placed Brazos in charge of the horse remuda. In consequence, he had only a limited idea of what was taking place on the range. But Brazos was a cowman to his finger tips and some sixth sense warned him that certain members of the crew, at least, were not over particular about ownership when using a running iron. The truth of this was driven home to him one night as he lay wrapped in his blankets in the shadow of the chuck wagon. Two lone members of the outfit sat not far away, talking confidentially.

"I made forty dollars more easy money to-day," one boasted with a laugh. "The' was a bunch of Wes Ringold's unbranded yearlings runnin' at the head of Dry Gulch. So I caught ten and earmarked and ironed 'em with the old man's brand. That makes it near four hundred extra Asa owes me now."

His companion chuckled. "Brandin' another man's yearlin's at four dollars a head when you don't have to shoulder the blame yourself is easy money," he agreed. Then his voice grew serious. "But trouble is bound to bust loose when Wes Ringold starts to work and checks up his shortage. It'll pay Asa to keep his eye skinned then."

The first speaker sniffed. "Rats!" he exclaimed derisively. "Asa's got that figured. Wes Ringold ain't likely to find out he's short. What do you think Whipple took on this long, tall, Texas gunman for if it wasn't to bump Wes off. Asa will steer the two together directly and bait Wes into poppin' off his mouth. Then it'll be curtains for him. For the' say this guy Brazos is a curly wolf with a six-shooter."

It cost Brazos an effort of will to remain in his blankets, so strong was his desire to awaken his employer and confront him with this evidence. But sober consideration warned him there would be nothing gained by such an act. "Best thing I can do is drag it again," he reflected a little wearily, "and this time drag it far." He fell asleep wondering if after all it would be possible to outrun his reputation.

Early the next morning he sought Whipple and asked for his time. Asa was surprised and said so, and he tried to prevail on Brazos to change his mind. However, when Brazos refused to reconsider, he yielded gracefully.

"All right, we'll hit town some time the last of the week and I'll pay you off then," he promised.

Brazos nodded and turned away, little suspecting that even then his employer was cannily setting the stage for his predetermined program. But when a few days later the outfit struck town and Asa insisted on Brazos accompanying him to a certain saloon, he began to realize it. For among others in the saloon was a tall, blond cowman who was drinking at the bar with a companion.

"That there," whispered Asa, nudging Brazos, "is Wes Ringold. He thinks he's a bearcat with a pistol, but the fact is he's all bluff. Me, if the chance comes, I aim to show him up."

Purposefully inattentive, Brazos had little idea how the quarrel came about. Nor did he realize he was concerned in it until he found himself face to face with Wes Ringold, the latter's hand quivering an inch above his gun butt.

Thereupon Brazos took the verbal castigation of his life. The tall, blond cowman called him everything from a hired gunman downward, taunting him as a coward and daring him to draw. Brazos stood it all in silence and Wes Ringold never knew how near he was to death that moment.

Five minutes later Brazos left the saloon in company with Asa. He was white to the lips as a result of the bitter tongue-lashing and with difficulty was holding his temper in check. Nor did the fact that he had successfully thwarted his employer's game, afford him any satisfaction. Brazos' humiliation was too great.

Rage mingled with disappointment likewise possessed Asa Whipple. A block away from the saloon several members of the crew, evidently waiting in close proximity, joined them. Emboldened perhaps by their presence, and mistaking the white rage on Brazos' face for the blanch of fear, Asa turned on him.

"Yo' danged, four-flushing coward," he began, "I've a mind to bump yo' off myself." And then he made the mistake which cost him his life. He drew his own gun.

Brazos' reaction was purely automatic. He fired once from the hip, and Asa sunk limply to the ground. Five minutes later a cloud of dust far out of town marked the trail Brazos had taken.

A brisk norther whipping out of the mountains the following morning, in spite of the brightly shining sun, brought an unusual chill to this Arizona country. The cold had penetrated the flat-topped stone and 'dobe building used as a stage stop halfway to Sweet Springs. Just within the circle of warmth cast off by a rusted air-tight heater sat a girl, the sole passenger on this day's stage. At the opposite side of the plainly furnished room the station tender stood talking in an undertone with the driver of the stage.

Presently the outside door opened letting in a fresh burst of cold air, and a fourth person entered. He was a tall young man whose gray eyes showed unmistakable signs of weariness. He walked straight across to where the pair waited and addressed himself to the station tender.

"My hoss," he said with a soft inflection that bespoke his Southern birth, "is done played out on me. So I aim to leave him here. If I don't come back fo' him inside of thirty days yo' may have him fo' his board and keep. Will yo' keep him on those terms?"

The station tender nodded and the newcomer turned to the driver. "I'll be ridin' with yo' as far as Sweet Springs when yo' pull out," he said. "Meantime, I'll be makin' my pony comfortable."

Barely had the door closed behind him before the station tender spoke: "I reckon," he said, "that's one of the Canyon Largo gang that Jack Dade has planted for this trip, for he wears two guns and he looks to me like he knows how to use 'em. What yo' say we stick him up befo' you start and let him ride hog tied to Sweet Springs if he's so bound to get there?"

The stage driver, however, instead of agreeing with this suggestion, shook his head. "You're way off," he declared. "That young fellow is a gunman right enough, but he ain't no robber so far's I ever heard. He's a bird called Brazos who has been ridin' for Asa Whipple's Mesquite Flat outfit. My guess is he's bust loose again and the law is after him. But that's his affair. If he's got the fare, he sure can ride."

Thus it came about that Brazos was the second passenger to ride within the stage. He had, just prior to starting, tossed a blanket roll atop the coach and started to climb up beside the driver. But this worthy pointed to several square boxes piled in a row along the footboard.

"You best ride inside," he said curtly. "I'm carryin' all the load I've room for here." Taking the hint, Brazos entered the coach.

Upon his coming the girl occupying the opposite seat shrank a bit farther toward one corner. Idly, Brazos pondered this, for he did not know that from her seat beside the stove she had overheard the conversation between the station tender and the driver.

For several hours the stage lurched on and as the sun began to sink behind the distant mountain peaks the air grew chillier and the whipping, penetrating wind searched out every crevice in the stage. At length the audible chattering of the girl's teeth aroused Brazos from the reverie which possessed him. For some moments he studied her intently from behind half-drooped lids.

"Why," he mused, "she's pretty as a picture. I—I had almost forgotten the' was girls who looked like that." Thereupon he opened the door and bidding the driver stop, climbed outside.

"If yo'll trouble to toss down that roll of blankets," he said, "I'll try and make it mo' comfortable here inside. What yore stage needs is a stove."

The driver, half smothered in a huge, fur coat, silently complied, and Brazos again clambered within. Unstrapping the roll, he selected a pair of heavy woolen blankets and turned to the girl.

"If yo'll allow me to wrap these about yo', ma'am," he said diffidently, "yo'll not be quite so cold." When she protested a trifle distantly that she was warm enough, there was rebuke in his tones.

"Why, I can hear yore teeth chattering way over here, ma'am," he protested, and ignoring her half-hearted remonstrances he proceeded to tuck the blankets round her. Thereafter, he again relapsed into silence.

At length full darkness came. The stage creaked and groaned as it took an up grade, finally to lurch to a sudden stop. A metallic clinking followed and immediately the driver's whole-hearted curses became audible within.

Brazos thrust his head outside. "Unless yo' want to be handled, yo' cut that out," he muttered fiercely.

The curses subsided, but there was a wail in the driver's voice as he clambered to the ground. "That off front wheel has threw its tire," he explained. "Right now it's layin' off yonder somewhere in the dark. Of all the bad luck!"

Closing the door, Brazos stepped without. "Just what do yo' figure to do now?" he asked. "Unhitch a hoss and ride on into Sweet Springs fo' help?"

"Not by a long shot," returned the driver. "It's a good fifteen miles into Sweet Springs and all uphill. Besides, this ain't no millionaire line. Us drivers are supposed to make our own road repairs. Me, I aim to build up a fire and sweat the darned thing back on."

So an hour later, while the tire was heating in an enormous greasewood fire, Brazos was busying himself preparing supper. He had unearthed coffee, bacon, and a handful of hard crackers, together with a few utensils for cooking from a battered chuck box belonging to the driver.

"It ain't much, ma'am," he apologized a little later as he proffered the girl the food, "but it'll sort of stay yore hunger and help to keep the chill out."

She thanked him prettily, evincing none of the revulsion his first entrance to the stage had inspired. A little later, while the driver was fitting the tire, they sat beside the fire chatting, and some peculiarity in her inflection caused him to remark: "Yo' were bo'n in Texas, ma'am?"

"No," she told him, "in Tennessee. I spent a year in Texas, though."

A gleam of interest momentarily chased the weariness from Brazos' eyes. "Why," he exclaimed in surprise, "I was bo'n in Tennessee myself. But I left there when I was only a baby."

"You are all Texan, though," she answered, "even to your name."

The interest in Brazos' eyes gave way to a look half pain, half regret. "Yo' know who I am then, ma'am?" he asked a little wearily.

"Yes," she said, "I have just placed you."

Thereafter the conversation lagged, and a little later Brazos with much pains arranged the blankets within the circle of the fire's warmth.

"Yo' just snuggle down in there, ma'am," he told the girl, "and try and snatch yoreself a bit of sleep. Meanwhile, I'll lend the driver a helpin' hand. Fo' if I don't it looks like we'd be here two, three days."

But what assistance Brazos rendered the driver was only perfunctory. His thoughts were not on the task in hand. Instead they lingered on the girl now asleep by the fire.

Daylight was graying the rocky trail before the wheel was repaired. The wind had subsided with the dawn and starting time saw a red sun bathing the summits of the adjacent mountains. Nevertheless, the cold-stiffened horses made but lagging progress on the uphill grade and midmorning found the stage fully six miles from Sweet Springs.

Brazos, silencing his protests with a gesture, had taken his place beside the driver at the start. He had wrapped himself in a mantle of uncommunicative silence, turning every little while to survey the back trail. Now with the sun halfway to its zenith, he laid a detaining hand on the driver's arm, after another look behind.

"If yo'll stop and drop me off, I'll be obliged," he said, "fo' unless I'm bad mistaken yonder hossmen wish to see me."

Pulling his horses to a halt, the driver unearthed a pair of glasses from somewhere within the boot and took a long look backward.

"What makes you think the're after you?" he asked a trifle hoarsely, facing to the front again.

"I killed a man back yonder, a man named Asa Whipple. So I expect that is a sheriff's posse trailin' me."

The driver did not seem utterly displeased. "You done just right to kill that old buzzard," he declared, "for he was a blemish on the face of the earth. But you're mistaken about that bein' any posse. That's the Canyon Largo gang, with Jack Dade ridin' in the lead."

"The Canyon Largo gang?" repeated Brazos. "I never heard tell of them."

The driver kicked the boxes at his feet. "The's twenty thousand here in specie," he explained, "and the company knew Jack Dade had wind of the shipment so they figured to throw him off the scent by shipping it a day ahead of schedule. The plan would have worked, too, if that tire had stayed in place. But some one wised 'em up and now they're on our trail."

"What yo' aim to do?" asked Brazos. "Make a race of it?"

"No use," averred the driver and pointed up grade with his whip. Two hundred yards ahead the walls of a narrow canyon converged on the road and the incline stiffened greatly. "I'll stop where the trail's narrowest," he explained. "Then one of us kin take a hoss and ride to Sweet Springs for help. Mebbe if the other puts up a good stiff fight meantime, the posse kin make it back before them bandits get the specie."

Brazos nodded his approval. "I reckon both of us can hold 'em off while the girl rides fo' help," he declared grimly, and bent from the seat so he could see within the stage. "Can yo' ride a hoss, ma'am?" he called.

"If it's well broken and gentle," the girl replied, a note of surprise in her voice.

The driver swore softly. "That let's her out then," he affirmed, "for all four of them broncs are wild as they can be,

and then some. Either you or me will have to go."

"I'm stayin'," declared Brazos grimly and said no more.

At length the stage reached the narrowest point in the pass at the top of a small divide. Here the driver halted and set the brakes. "You might tell her what's goin' to come off," he suggested, flirting a thumb toward the interior of the coach. "Meantime, I'll be cuttin' loose a hoss."

So they clambered to the ground from opposite sides and, while the driver was making his selection of a horse to ride, Brazos informed the girl of their predicament. She listened quietly and only a slight paling of her face betrayed the emotion the news provoked.

By this time the driver had made his choice of horses. Catching Brazos' eye, he beckoned him forward. "The's a rifle in the boot and ammunition with it," he said. Then he lowered his voice. "You best persuade the gal to try and find a hidin' place in yonder rocks, for you know how it is. If you get bumped off, specie won't be the only thing them bandits'll grab. Jack Dade, they say, ain't got much respect for women."

Brazos' lips were compressed into a thin, straight line. "I'll speak to her about it," he promised.

When, after assisting the driver to mount, he returned to the coach, the girl was waiting. In an awkward, constrained manner he attempted to convey his wishes. "Yo' have plenty of time," he urged.

The girl glanced down the back trail, her eyes resting momentarily on the moving dust cloud which betokened the oncoming bandits. "What are your plans?" she asked.

With a gesture Brazos designated a small depression beside the coach. "I will take shelter there, ma'am," he told her, "and try to stand them off. Yo' can hide among that pile of rocks just above. Likely they will never suspect yore presence. Besides, I'm goin' to give yo' one of my guns. Then if by chance I get snuffed out, yo' can make it hot fo' them if they try to take yo'."

For a short space the girl compared the almost impregnable position chosen for her with the shallow depression Brazos had selected for himself. "Why not both of us take shelter among the rocks?" she asked.

"Because, ma'am," Brazos lied, "it is too small," and prayed underneath his breath that she would believe him. For he lacked the courage to tell her that his motive was to keep her out of any line of fire; that he would gladly die a thousand deaths rather than see one hair of her head come to harm.

Again the girl's glance flitted from one hiding place to the other. Then she spoke and there was a finality in her voice that told Brazos further argument would be futile.

"This is the second time," she said softly, "I have been the unwitting cause of getting you into trouble. But this time I intend to share it with you. Wherever you take shelter, there I mean to stay."

Brazos' eyes widened in a blank, uncomprehending stare.

"I was the girl to whom you refused to apologize at your father's command," the girl explained. "Our parents were great friends in Tennessee. So, when my father died I came to Texas close by where you lived to teach school."

"But——" began Brazos.

"But," continued the girl, taking the word from Brazos' lips, "I could not content myself there when I learned your father had lost his son because of me. So now I am on my way to teach in Sweet Springs. Perhaps——"

What her next words were to be, Brazos never knew. For just then a bullet fired by one of the oncoming gang whistled perilously close. He pushed her gently toward the depres-

sion beside the stage. "It's Hobson's choice with us now, ma'am," he said, "fo' we have lingered here too late."

Time crept by, time punctuated by the harsh report of rifles and the lower, more booming, note of .45s. Once a bullet deflected from a near-by rock creased a furrow the length of Brazos' forehead. Again, the girl's sharp eyes caught sight of a skulking figure seeking to ambush them from the rear. She called Brazos' attention to it and when at the report of his pistol the skulker dropped from sight she gave a little exclamation of relief.

At length came a lull in the attackers' efforts. Unconsciously, Brazos' hand sought the girl's and closed firmly about it.

"Your father wants you to come back to Texas," she told him presently.

"An' yo'?" he inquired, holding his breath at the daring of the question.

"It would make me very happy to go back—now," she answered shyly.

Brazos' heartbeats quickened almost to suffocation, nor when the second attack commenced did they diminish. And this time he fought with an exultation and daring he had never before experienced. Twice he recklessly exposed himself to end the journey of a possible flanker, and twice he repulsed a direct frontal attack.

Then, like the snuffing out of a candle, all firing ceased and presently came the clatter of retreating hoofs. Brazos rose to his feet and glanced up the trail.

"The posse from Sweet Springs is comin' to our rescue," he said in unfeigned relief.

Side by side they watched the approaching horsemen. At length when the riders were but a short distance off the girl spoke softly:

"You will be going now?" she asked.

"Yes," said Brazos, "back to Texas. provided I do not have to go alone." And reading consent in her eyes, he gathered her into his arms.

## MUSHROOM GROWTH OF TEXAS TOWNS

DURING the past year or so there has been such a mushroom growth of towns in Texas that compilers of the postal directory have found it impossible to keep pace with the times. This phenomenal growth, mostly due to oil and agricultural opportunities, included the town of Borger, which, within a year from the time it was laid out, had a population of more than twenty-five thousand. Nor has Borger been alone in its great increase. In fact, the Panhandle has ceased to marvel at municipal development, as has the district a few hundred miles south of this region.

There is, for instance, McCamey, which a year ago was open prairie, but now has approximately twenty thousand inhabitants. Agriculture has kept pace with oil in bringing about this extraordinary change in the tenor of Texas life. Thus new towns have sprung up in two widely separated sections of the State —in the oil regions of the Panhandle, and in the extreme lower zone adjacent to the Rio Grande, about six hundred miles southeast of the oil fields. Railroads have adapted their courses to changing conditions and have, in many cases, built new lines to enhance the agricultural development.

There has been much excitement accompanying this development, which recalls the "booming" of the old West. Most of the pictured romance of life on the frontier is there. In fact, the building of towns has come to be almost a profession. And the climax of it was probably reached in 1927.

# Dad Simms Takes a Short Cut

## By Frank Richardson Pierce

*Author of "Two Shooting Stars," etc.*

THE oldest inhabitant of Cold Deck, Dad Simms, had the habit of giving the camp a thrill at least once a year. Usually this happened in spring when the ice went out, the streams opened up for travel, and miners headed for the creeks. The very nature of the country made prospecting impossible in winter, though if one had a good claim winter was an ideal time to freight in supplies. Then the swamps were frozen and covered with snow. Above all, there were no mosquitoes. Streams that in the summer were brawling torrents, in winter moved sluggishly beneath the ice or were frozen solid to the bottom.

Thus it happened that in spring prospectors all hit the trail about the same time. Groups of men loafed about the general stores and trading posts, some of them looked wise and some really were wise. They laid in stocks of supplies, bought rubber boots, and discussed the relative merits of Malemute and husky dogs.

Prospecting was in the air and if any man had ever gone out and panned gravel he was certain to become restless in spring. Dad Simms was no exception. He had panned creeks off and on for sixty years.

This spring, "Tubby" Willows made sure Dad would not go out and lose himself. He had become lost, though he denied it, on two occasions, and groups of Cold Deck miners had engaged in a wild man hunt. Tubby had given Dad a little rope this spring and had high hopes of the old-timer working off the fever. Thanks to one Dabney, who had his eye on a thousand dollars Dad had in the old poke, an old mine had been acquired. Dabney had salted the mine, but Dad, who knew a thing or two, played Dabney's own game and emerged with several thousand dollars' profit.

"Got some money," Dad would say when discussing the matter, "worked

like heck trying to find gold where there wasn't, and never saw a color outside of what that critter Dabney had salted."

And so bets were being laid that Dad Simms would go prospecting and get himself lost, despite a solemn promise to Tubby Willows that he wouldn't prospect farther away from Cold Deck than he could travel in a day.

"And that don't mean travel by airplane," Tubby answered, "it means on your own legs!"

"On my own laigs," the old-timer agreed.

It is usually calm before a storm and there were those who believed Dad's calmness indicated a storm. He occupied his old corner chair close to the stove in the New Deal Café, told yarns, some of which were true, but all of which were interesting; speculated on the possibility of there being "pay" in different creeks; puffed at a corncob pipe and chuckled whenever he saw Dabney swinging down the street.

Then something happened.

A man with hair and beard a foot long, wearing torn clothing, and carrying a Hudson's Bay pack on his back, limped into town.

"Old Rip Van Winkle himself," Tubby cried, "he'll see some changes after twenty years' sleep."

"Ain't no sech thing," Dad snapped, "that's old 'Gun-shy' Warren, in person. First name's Reggie, but he lived that down fifty years ago after killing three men that figured because his name was dudish he was an easy mark." Dad uncrossed his legs to the squeaking of his ancient joints. "Hi, Gun-shy, ain't you dead yet?"

Gun-shy stopped dead in his tracks. "You don't mean to say you're still clutterin' up the earth, Simms?" he retorted. "Dad burn! I figgered your tombstone had settled and fallen over years ago. Beats the Dutch how some folks drag along year after year without excuse! Come on, I'll buy you a drink!"

"Drink? It can't be done! We've got prohibition!"

"What in heck's prohibition?"

"It keeps a man from gettin' a good drink of good likker!" Dad explained.

"How long's this been goin' on?" Warren demanded.

"Ever since the war!"

"What war?"

Half of Cold Deck was listening now. Dad began to explain.

Warren tugged at his beard. "I must have lost some years. I cut off my beard whenever it got in the way. That, I figgered, was once a year. Six cuttin's would mean six years. I went into the back country in '16. This must be the year 1922."

"It's 1928," Dad cried. "You've just as good as cut six years offn your life."

"Prohibition, eh? Thats what comes of a man not stayin' around where he can watch things." He slammed a poke down in front of Tubby Willows. "Open up a case of canned milk," he ordered, "come on boys, the drinks are on me!"

Tubby set up a row of glasses filled with near-beer. Dad managed to swallow it, but Gun-shy Warren nearly choked to death.

"Come with me, Simms," he said in a quiet voice, "I want to tell you suthin worth listenin' to."

Dad listened with interest. "Gol durn!" he exclaimed twice, "well, gol durn! But can you get over the pass so early in the year?"

"A kid like you couldn't," Warren answered, "but a grown-up man like myself prob'ly could. I came over a worse pass a week ago to-day. Suit yourself, it ain't nothin' to me one way or another."

Dad Simms had vanished.

Tubby Willows was the first to notice it. "That fellow Warren had some-

thing to do with it," he growled, "and I'm going to find Warren."

Warren was not to be found. He had stopped briefly at a rooming house, disposed of his fur, said the country had gone to the dogs, and promised he would not be seen for another ten years or so.

Tubby Willows did not need to urge men to follow Dad Simms. Every man in camp who could scrape enough money for a grubstake was ready to hit the trail. As most of them were about ready any way, no time was lost. They spread over the country like a flood, searching for anything that would give a hint as to which way Dad had gone.

They put two and two together, these men, and each man got the same result. Gun-shy Warren had tipped Dad Simms off to a good prospect and Dad was on his way. "What's a promise not to go when he's headed for a sure thing," they pointed out. Even Tubby, reluctant as he was to believe Dad would go back on his word, had no answer for this.

"Rough" Rhodes was the first to find a clew. "Here's his camp," he announced to the men with him, "about three days old. Say, he's sure headed for bad country!" Rhodes pointed to a series of sawtooth peaks, notching the sky. Storms raged among them, even in midsummer. The softness of spring was nothing in the lives of those peaks.

"Take a look at this!" another shouted.

He pointed to a sign on which Dad had scrawled a message in charcoal. It read:

Don't follow me, boys. I ain't after gold.

"That's enough for me," Rhodes announced. "If the old boy says he's not after gold, he's telling the truth. I don't know where he's going, unless it's crazy, but I'm going back!"

The others shook their heads. "He can't throw me off the trail that way," one of them said.

"I'll take Dad's word," Rough insisted. He frowned darkly, resenting the suggestion that Dad would deceive. I've known him a long time. I'm going back."

"Go then," the others answered, "we're sticking. That old cuss is after something good."

On the way back, Rhodes passed the word that Dad's trail had been found. "He says he's not after gold," Rhodes always added, "he knew if he hit for the hills there would be a stampede and he's trying to save the boys a lot of time and trouble. Better turn back."

Some did, but many of them did not. They drove themselves to the limit to overtake Dad before he managed to throw them off. However, as if sensing some would persist in following. Dad continued to leave his warning signs.

Only once they saw him—high on a glacier, struggling slowly upward in the teeth of a tremendous wind. Even at the distance they could see his parka whipping about his legs. He was carrying a small pack, but the major part of his load was carried on the backs of three dogs. He had paid a hundred dollars each for them shortly before leaving, and there were no better dogs in Cold Deck.

Although they could see him, nevertheless, he was still two days ahead. Scaling the face of that glacier was impossible. It required two days' hard work to reach the place where they had seen the old sour dough. By that time Dad was gone. However, scratched on the crust of a snowfield was another message:

You blamed chumps, don't waste your time following me. I'd tell you where I'm going only Tubby Willows might try and have me stopped.

Several turned back here, but the majority stuck on the old-timer's trail.

High above, Dad Simms looked down and saw his followers. "The danged fools," he grumbled, "well, it serves 'em right for doubtin' my word. Never lied to a man yet. Got to keep going, though, or I won't make it!"

He was puffing badly. The high altitude, something over eight thousand feet, had a lot to do with it. He uncoiled a long line, tied it about his waist, and attached the other end to the strongest dog's collar. "Now mush," he ordered. The dog's steady tug on the line materially aided the old sour dough. "Funny how long a man can go after he's ready to drop, if he's got his mind sot on it," reflected Dad.

A howling blizzard caught him that night. Surrounded by his dogs, which kept him warm, Dad let the blizzard howl. He wondered how the boys below were faring. The storm continued for two days, during which he did not move. The night of the third he heard voices. Peering from behind a boulder, Dad saw the indefinite figures of four men staggering ahead.

"He can't get through stuff like this," one of them panted, "we're bound to catch him. He's too old for the gaff."

"The heck I am!" Dad snarled. Silently, he packed his dogs, and forced himself into the gale. At times it all but lifted him off his feet. Again and again he had to crawl along. The dogs howled with fear and Dad had to go ahead. They followed him because, fearing the unknown, they did not want to be alone.

A blinding day followed and Dad experienced a touch of snow blindness. He bandaged his eyes, tied the line to the lead dog, and continued, knowing the dog would avoid all danger. Often he stumbled and fell, but he always got to his feet again.

He did not camp that night, but kept at it. The dogs were carrying all of the load, and almost carried Dad up the slopes. At dawn he planned to camp, but was forced to content himself with a rest. He risked looking over the country. He knew he must be well through the pass and on the mighty snow slope that ran for twenty-five miles toward the ocean. The sun was just rising, but it was not bright. Dad adjusted a pair of binoculars and looked over the land. A fringe of blue indicated the sea. Was that smoke rising on the horizon's edge? Dad watched it for several moments. "That's smoke!" he groaned, "ain't no rest for the wicked."

Dad made his way to the nearest brush and cut two thin pieces of wood that would just fit over his eyes. He cut a series of fine holes in each. This had the tendency to blur objects and keep out the light, yet would permit him in a general way to see the trail. He also smeared the skin about his eyes with charcoal.

"Got to make it!" he growled. "Got to make that steamer or I'm licked at the start. Heh! Heh! Heh! And they's them as says I should be looked after! First man through the short cut in three years. And if it hadn't been for Gun-shy Warren I might have figured I couldn't make it. Well, mush, boys. Here's hopin' my old laigs hold out."

A group of tired men returned to Cold Deck. "Any news of Dad Simms?" Tubby Willows inquired.

"Yes. He got through the short cut and was legging it for a steamer the last we saw," one of them answered. "I can't figure what's got into him. You don't suppose he's going to get married, Tubby."

"No. Nobody ever writes to him. It's something that Gun-shy Warren told him. I'll cable 'Flapjack' to meet the boat!"

Flapjack received a long cable from his partner. Traveling as he was with the rodeo, cables from Tubby were frequent, but this one upset him. "What's got into that old boy, anyway!" he exclaimed. But that was all Flapjack Meehan said. A man of action, he acted. Turning the show over to his assistants, Flapjack headed for Seattle. Arrived there, he found that the steamer from the North was already in.

"Yes, Meehan," the purser said in answer to his question, "Simms came down. No, he didn't say where he was going. No. I've no idea. Yes, he seemed to be in his right mind, except he told some awful bear yarns to a traveling man."

There was only one man in the world who looked like Dad Simms, and that man was Dad Simms. Flapjack made the rounds of the hotels and, obtaining no clew, headed for the railroad stations. The ticket agent at the Union Station, however, gave him all the information he wanted. "The old man bought a ticket for Simmsville," he said. "It's some place in the Middle West. Wait, I'll look it up and give you the State."

"Did he seem to be in his right mind?"

"He seemed to be a very active gentleman," the ticket agent replied, "but in a high state of excitement; wanted to know if he could get to Simmsville by ten o'clock on the morning of May 30th. I told him that he would arrive the night before at midnight."

Flapjack scratched his head. "Give me a ticket to Simmsville. Never heard of the place, but I suppose the engineer can find it."

It was nine o'clock in the morning when Flapjack stepped off the three-coach train that lingered briefly at Simmsville. The town looked pretty much the same as any other small mid-Western town. It had brick buildings, paved streets, and an atmosphere of steady prosperity—as if no one were very rich or very poor.

The streets were decorated with flags and already people were lining the curb. High overhead an airplane circled. It dropped a wreath, and Flapjack saw it fall in the cemetery. "Wonder how I'll find Dad," he said. "Hello—music!"

A band was playing a stirring tune. Around a corner swung a company of men. Flapjack recognized them as regulars. It was evident they expected to act as an honor guard, because the company stopped and came to order arms. Flapjack worked his way nearer. At that moment the company got under way again. From around the corner Flapjack heard a familiar voice:

"'Tention! For'd! Hump!"

From the crowd came a ringing cheer. Flapjack gasped, then bellowed with joy. "Hello, Dad! It's Flapjack!"

Dadd Simms started, but with fine military bearing scorned to recognize any one while he was on parade. He was dressed in the uniform of a Civil War veteran. On his shoulder he carried an ancient gun; a battered cap of the period was pulled down over one eye.

"He's a corporal!" Flapjack exclaimed. "Well, dog-gone his old skin!"

Behind Dad came three men. All that were left of his old squad that had followed him through four long years of war. Dad was walking so straight it was a wonder every joint in his body did not squeak.

Flapjack came to salute, then he cheered. All down the line the spectators cheered at the top of their lungs. The regulars slowed down, setting their pace to that of the old soldiers. And it was a very slow pace toward the end. They stopped at the cemetery and the old guard fired a salute. Dad and his men dropped to the nearest benches and mopped their brows, but Dad was the first to get up.

"I'm a bit tougher'n the rest of the boys, always was," he explained, to Flapjack, who came up to greet him. "Come danged near not making it. Old Gun-shy Warren reminded me that way back in '78 we agreed to meet and parade fifty years later. Here we are, what's left of us—all except Gun-shy. He always was hot-tempered!" Dad mopped his brow. "Just did make it," he went on. "Busted right through the short-cut, too. First man through in three years. Heh! Heh! And with half of Cold Deck after me thinking I was on a stampede! The darned chumps! Kinda wish Gun-shy was here."

"Why didn't he come along?" Flapjack inquired.

"Said he'd be hanged if he'd parade unless he could get a little something to wet his whistle afterward and do it legal. Gun-shy always was a little funny that way, and apt to fly off the handle. Say, Flapjack, what you doin' here?" The question had just occurred to the old-timer.

"Looking after you, of course!" Flapjack grunted.

Dad withered him with a glance. "Do you think I need lookin' after?" he inquired scornfully.

"Taking it all in all, I guess you don't," Flapjack admitted. "I might as well take the next train."

"Come to think of it, Flapjack," Dad said, "may be you'd better stay and keep an eye on me. I'm taking an old sweetheart to a dance t'-night. I wish you'd come along, in case I show signs of gettin' sentimental and the like—you can never tell about a kid of my age. I ain't quite ready to settle down yet."

## INDIAN DIRGE FOR WILD WEST SHOWMAN

AMID the colorful surroundings of an old Western ranch, Colonel Joe Miller, pioneer rancher of the Cherokee Strip and noted Wild West showman, was recently buried while his Indian friends of the range sounded tribal tom-toms and chanted the funeral dirge. Miller had lived most of his life near Ponca City, Oklahoma, where he was manager of the famous 101 Ranch at the time of his death. Among the five thousand persons attending his funeral were the Ponca Indian tribesmen, mingling with the cow-punchers and Russian military men who fled their country during the revolution and found refuge in the colonel's show.

Near the veranda of the ranch house, the colonel's Arabian horse stood, saddled as if to take the old Westerner on his last ride over the range. Chief Eagle delivered an eulogy in the Ponca tongue, which Colonel Miller spoke. The colonel had been elected a chief in the tribe and named "Walking Above." The name was a recognition of his imposing stature. Miller's own money paid the expenses of the Indians' tribute to him. Realizing their love of ceremony and their comparative poverty, he made provisions in his will for the mourning period.

Miller was a real old-timer. He knew the cattle country before it was hemmed in by farmers and torn up by oil men. And he was one of the few remaining range seekers who pushed westward and north from Texas into Oklahoma and New Mexico.

# Unloaded for Bear

## By Roland Krebs

*Author of "The Naked Pie," etc.*

A LOT of my pals back in Times Square have an idea that I can count myself lucky every time a day goes by without me being clawed and chewed by wild animals out here in Montana.

Well, when my friend, Danny Dever—not the same guy who was hanged in the morning—gets back to Forty-second Street, the boys will be convinced of it. Where the truth falls short, Danny will make up for it. Danny's an even better liar than I am—although it would be hard to get some folks to believe that.

Right now I can hear him telling it: "Yes, sir; he suddenly stepped out from behind a tree less'n fifty feet in front of me—one of the biggest, meanest, black bears ever seen in Montana." And I can just see the boys sigh with relief because business don't take them often west of Van Cortlandt Park.

Funny thing about it is that Danny did have a set-to with one of the biggest and meanest bears ever seen in Montana. It was during a visit he paid me.

In case you don't think I'm a popular guy, let me tell you that he was the second visitor from the East in less than ten days that I'd had. The other was Mike McGrath, known to vaudeville as Signor Tito Cesare. I used to be in vaudeville myself, you know, before I became a Montana cow-puncher on the R Bar R to get me a mess of health.

It was while I was knocking 'em dead in vaudeville with my comedy and hoofing that I met these two dudes. Danny Dever used to be an artists' press agent, but lately he's been three-sheeting for the Ball & Bradley Circus, the greatest, the most gigantic, the most stupendous show on earth.

Mike and Clarence, his trained bear, which he uses in his act, were the first to arrive. Mike was on his way to Seattle, where he was due in three weeks to start a coast tour before working East again. He and Danny had never met.

There was plenty of excitement around the R Bar R when Mike arrived. He hadn't said nothing about bringing his bear with him.

In fact, "Red" Johns, who'd gone to the railroad depot with a wagon to get Mike, didn't dream that he was crating a bear back from town with him. That was because Clarence was in a big box with just a slit in it for an occasional whiff of fresh air. I don't think Red would have stayed on the wagon seat if he'd have known who was behind him.

Anyway, after Mike had arrived and we'd slapped backs and such, he said apologetically, "Al, I brought Clarence along. I didn't think you'd mind. Clarence is awfully fond of me and when we're separated he won't eat, and you know I can't open a big-time bill with an act that don't look like it's getting regular groceries."

"Sure; that's all right," I told him. "We can stable him somewhere around here."

I've known Clarence for years and he's as nice a bear as I ever palled around with. He's as gentle as a lamb with an inferiority complex and crazy about anybody who'll feed him cranberries.

So, Mike hoists the lid of Clarence's wheelless sedan. The minute the lid flew up, Clarence flew out. First he lumbered up to Mike and threw his big front paws around his master and licked his face. Then, recognizing me as his old pal, he squeezed me breathless and licked my face and rubbed himself against me.

When this all happened, "Shorty" Nolan was sitting on a nail keg playing the harmonica. "Biffalo" Bull was playing solitaire. Red Johns was mending some harness. "Slim" Evers, Bill Tell, and "Hungry" Hosford were having an argument.

Yeah, I said *was*. Clarence no sooner came busting out, than Shorty shinned up a tree like a monkey, Biffalo Bull ran up a ladder to the bunkhouse roof and then kicked over the ladder, and the rest of the cow chaperons streaked inside the cook shack and locked the door.

Over near the watering trough, Crumby, the little dog belonging to our foreman's wife, Mrs. "Bucky" Durbin, was eating from his pan a mixture of boiled oatmeal, onions, and ground beef that Red Johns had fixed him. Crumby hadn't seen the bear all this time.

Clarence smelled Crumby's chow and located it by sniffing the air. Then the bear toddled clumsily over to where the mutt, blissfully ignorant, was chewing, and with one sweep from one of his forepaws he brushed the dog aside and fell on the grub. Crumby gave one look and ran *ki-yi-yi-ing* into his kennel.

"Hey, you big bum!" Mike yelled at his pet, starting after him. "Let that dog's chow alone. You got a crust to go swiping from your host."

Mike gave Clarence a kick—just a gentle one, though—and then slapped his face. It was a laugh to see that big bear hang his head and to hear him whimper. After that Mike fed his big bum three loaves of bread and some fresh apples and carrots.

One by one and step by step the bunk-house gents began rallying around, all very, very cautious until Mike convinced them Clarence's aim in life was to be just a pal.

From that day on, the bear was everybody's friend—including even Crumby's—and he seemed quite happy bunking in a tool shed and soaking up Montana's fine air.

Three days after Mike McGrath and Clarence arrived, I got the following telegram:

> The most stupendous show on earth hyphen guess whose I mean hyphen now in winter quarters near Missoula before starting spring tour of West coast stop Coax me a little bit and I will spend a week with you stop Love and kisses from DANNY DEVER.

I've always been plenty fond of Danny and I wired him at once that our

latch string was out. He arrived next day.

I can't imagine what Danny thought a place like the R Bar R was, because included in his baggage was a bag of golf clubs, the same being something none of the outfit ever had seen before. Shorty Nolan thought they were hockey sticks.

Included also in his baggage were three leather-and-canvas gun cases, a game bag, a dude's corduroy shell vest, and a khaki hunting suit, including trick cap, like members of the House of Commons wear when grouse shooting.

"I thought I might get a chance to do a little hunting," said Danny, who is no slouch of a Nimrod, as lots of Maine and Canadian woods people will gladly tell you. "Anything around here to hunt much?"

Before I could answer him, Bill Tell, who aspires to be the champion kidder of the United States, Hawaii, the Philippines, and Porto Rico, piped up, winking at me and the rest of the boys.

"Anything you want to hunt, mister," he said seriously, "short of elephants, tigers, and moose."

"Get out!" Danny busted out joyously. "What have you got?"

"Well, if you like bird hunting," Bill went on stringing him, "the quail and pheasants around here are so thick you can knock 'em over with a pea blower. The season's never closed, neither. Same with ducks, wild geese, plovers, snipes, wood doves, and mud hens. Rabbits? You'll fall over 'em if you don't look careful. Squirrels? That patch of oak and hickory over near the Angle H outfit is so full of squirrels they bump each other out of the trees when they move around."

"Gee, that's great!" said Danny Dever, putting his shotgun together and sighting it at a fence post. He picked up one of his rifles with a puzzled expression on his face. "I wonder if I ought to pack along a rifle," he remarked to Bill Tell. "Any big fellows of any kind out his way?"

Bill studied for a minute. "Well," he answered finally, "now and then somebody kills a timber wolf and again a catamount, but that's sort of seldom. If I was you, I'd just take your shotgun."

"That's what I think," Danny agreed. "I've always thought that most of this Wild West stuff was hooey. Personally, I'll be content with a mess of quail or squirrels."

Some time later, while Danny was up having a chat with Mr. and Mrs. Durbin and we were smoking around the bunk house, Slim Evers piped up with, "Say, fellows! We forgot to show Danny Dever the bear, Clarence."

"Hey, nix!" Bill Tell barked. "That's just what we don't want to show him."

"Why?" asked five voices, my own included.

Bill started in to laugh, quietly at first and then louder. Finally he was hugging his sides to keep them from busting.

"The way I got it figured out," he told us at last, "Danny Dever is looking for a few thrills while he's here, and Clarence can give him one.

"Danny Dever's hot for some squirrel hunting, ain't he? All right. We'll take him into that patch of woods near the Angle H outfit. Mike, here, will be hiding in some shrubbery with Clarence. When we come along, Mike'll shove Clarence out. Then I want to watch Mr. Dever. Gentlemen, that'll be a sight to the world."

"So?" Mike McGrath spoke up. "And fill my bear and possibly me full of No. 7½ chilled shot. What a swell sense of humor you've got. The comedy is out—at least where it concerns my bear it's out."

"Now wait a minute, Mike," Bill put in. "I'll fix up some of Danny's shells. I'll take all the shot out and leave just

the wads and the powder in. That won't hurt nothing and it'll give us a picnic."

There was a lot of discussion, in which I took no part, and finally all the gang voted that it would be lots of good, clean fun to frame Danny, the big-game hunter from Times Square. The reason I never took no part was because I didn't think it was such a hot idea, inasmuch as these fellows didn't know that Danny had an awfully weak heart that wouldn't stand for many big scares. Rather than call it all off, I thought it would furnish just as many laughs to give Danny a nudge as to what was in the wind and let him turn the tables on them.

So, I tipped him off to the whole job.

"This bear that's hidden out in the tool shed wouldn't hurt a flea," I told him. "He's just a big, loving sap. When you see him, throw away your shotgun—it'll send you in right as a hunter with the boys, because any fool knows you can't do more than annoy a bear with a shotgun—and draw a knife and then go up and punch Clarence in the nose. He'll probably roll over on his back and whimper and then you sit on him."

"Thanks, Al," Danny said. "I'll give the boys a treat."

The big hunt was all set for next day. Next day was pay day when the R Bar R boys usually flock to town to get necessities but principally unnecessities and come home broke. The fact that all of them voted to go along hunting showed how keen they were for framing Danny Dever.

We all had a unusually early breakfast, after which the boss paid us off.

"Now for some wild meat!" said Bill Tell happily, tucking five tens into his pockets and picking up his shotgun.

"Remember," I cautioned Danny in an undertone, "that late last night Bill 'fixed' all your shells, so, if you see a rabbit or a squirrel or something, don't boob yourself. You couldn't hit it anyway."

"I'll just fire and cuss for missing and act dumb," he told me.

Through the woods we were going to, two creeks run that form a fork about midway in the patch and it had been agreed that Mike and Clarence would be hiding around there to give Danny his fit.

I want to say for Danny that he sure knew how to play dumb hunter. We hadn't any more than started out than he pretended to be fooling with his shotgun and set it off, the load going right in front of Biffalo Bull's nose, and that old codger ain't been the same man since.

Fifteen minutes later Danny faked a fall over a log and, after he was lying on the ground, he let go with his gun again, shooting a lot of paper wads into Bill Tell's legs, which they stung nicely.

"If this is the kind of a hunter this dude is," Bill chuckled to me when he was in a better humor and over his fright, "he ought to be rich when he sees that bear. Remember, now; all you fellows act scared to death."

Another half hour's walk brought us to within half a mile of where we were to meet Mike McGrath and Clarence. The woods here were mixed tall timbers and saplings and the undergrowth was something fierce.

Bill Tell was in the lead, saying soon we could spread out now and keep quiet and wait for the squirrels to show.

"Great Scott, fellas—a bear!" Bill Tell yelled, stopping in his tracks and pointing to a thicket over which I could see the bear's head.

I was kind of surprised and thought Mike had picked the wrong spot, because this wasn't near the creek fork at all.

"Gee! It's a man-eater; who's got a rifle?" Biffalo Bull shouted, ready to bust laughing.

"There ain't a rifle in the crowd!" Slim Evers pretended to moan. "We're done for!"

One by one I could see the gang stealing glances at Danny Dever to see how the city guy was taking it. I, too, slipped Danny a glimpse from one corner of my eye and was surprised to see that his face was as white as flour and his eyes nearly popping from his head.

"Go on, Danny," I whispered to him. "Go up and punch Clarence in the nose."

He turned his blazing eyes on me, gulped a couple of times, and then with chattering teeth said, "Al, that ain't Clarence! It's Molly!"

"Who's Molly?" I asked him.

"One of the bears from our show," he informed me.

"What's she doing here?" I inquired.

"How do I know; she must have got out," he said.

I looked again and more carefully at the bear that was starting to come out of the thicket. I could easy see then that it wasn't Clarence. This baby here was snarling and showing her teeth and pawing the ground and all set to eat somebody for a meal.

"Well, if you know Molly," I suggested hastily to Danny Dever, "why, maybe you better go up and talk to her. Call her off."

"I know Molly—well," Danny panted, "and she ain't the kind of a bear that can be talked to or called off. Why, Al, she killed one of the keepers when we were playing in Columbus, Ohio, two years ago. That's one of the nastiest, meanest bears that was ever put on earth." He looked again to where Molly was starting to cross the ground toward us. "Run, fellows!" he yelled. "Run for your lives. That bear's a man-killer."

Danny turned and legged it for all he was worth.

"Look at him run! Look at him run!" Bill Tell howled with laughter. "What did I tell you? Look at him run! Hot dog!"

The fool threw himself on the ground and rolled around with laughter. Molly, the tough egg of the bear kingdom, got nearer and nearer to him.

"Bill! Bill!" I shouted. "That ain't Clarence. It's another bear. Bill! Bill!"

The clown couldn't hear me for laughing. The rest of the boys, however, did and started to retreat—fast.

Danny Dever was no yellow pup. He had run, but he came back—came back just in time to see Molly rush up and make a dive for the still laughing Bill Tell.

"What's the matter with you, you big bum?" Bill snapped, canning his laughter and jumping up. The quince still thought it was Clarence. "Try that out on yourself!" He gave Molly a awful punch in the nose, at the same time yelling, "Mike! Oh, Mike! Get this bear of yours."

Molly was not used to having gents punch her in the nose. She recoiled from surprise, snarling at Bill. Then the jokesmith saw that Molly was not Clarence. He made a jump for a young sycamore tree and the way he climbed it would make a monkey green with envy.

"Now he's safe!" Danny yelled.

"Bears can climb, Buddy," Bill Tell reminded him.

"Yes, but Molly's claws were filed last month to make her less dangerous when we pulled two ulcerated teeth for her," Danny explained. "Run, fellows—like you never did before. She'll stay there and keep Bill treed."

It had taken us a couple of hours to get out there from the R Bar R, but it only took us a few minutes to get back.

Waiting at the boss' office were five men from the circus who had raced down from Missoula on reports that

they received that Molly had been heading our way.

Molly's wagon cage, so it turned out, had sideswiped another wagon and the cage had busted and she got out and beat it before any one could interfere. The Ball & Bradley outfit was wintering in more or less open country and she had made good her first start. For miles she'd been scaring people into fits.

"The big boss, Mr. Bradley, is nearly wild," one of the circus guys said. "He's offered two hundred dollars reward for Molly's capture alive. You know what a valuable bear she is, Mr. Dever."

We all started back, armed with rifles, and the circus guys with ropes.

"Shoot her only if it's absolutely necessary, fellows," Danny begged us and we promised.

When we got to where Molly had Bill Tell treed, we went forward quietly on our hands and knees. The circus hands were in the lead with ropes.

Say, I wish you could have seen them babies throw loops around that bear, one from either side, and both pulled tight at once so Molly couldn't rush them! No cow-puncher ever roped a steer any prettier. They took a couple of turns around tree trunks with both ropes and Molly was caught. Easily, at Danny's direction, they moved the big bear away from the sycamore, but not very far.

Grinning from ear to ear, Danny Dever stepped up to the sycamore trunk, just out of Molly's reach. He whipped a billfold out of his pocket, counted out two hundred dollars, tied the bills to a pebble, and yelled, "Catch!" to Bill Tell.

Bill caught the money.

"What's this?" he asked dumbly.

"The boss of our circus offered two hundred dollars for the capture of this escaped bear, Bill," Danny told him. "I saw you punch her in the nose and capture her. That's your reward."

"Thanks," Bill told him. "Watch that derned bear close. I'm coming down."

"Move Molly over this way, fellows," Danny told his gang. "Slide her right up under this sycamore. Better not come down yet, Bill."

Bill crawled up a couple of more feet and held tight to a bough.

"Hey! What's the idea?" he howled. "I want to come down. Move your dawg-gone bear over."

"What for?" Danny asked innocently.

"I can't get down till you do," Bill complained.

"What's in it for me if I do?" Danny asked, grinning.

Led by the loud haw-haw of Biffalo Bull, all Bill's bunk-house mates started to laugh and give the joker the razzberry.

"Come on," Bill growled. "Let me down."

"What'll you give me if I move Molly?" Danny pinned him down.

Bill Tell frowned and studied. Finally he got out the two hundred dollars that had been tossed up to him and he looked at it.

"I'll give you two hundred dollars," he announced, seeing the point and throwing it down.

"That's not enough," Danny protested, picking up the jack.

"It's all I got," Bill said.

"You got paid this morning; I saw you stuff fifty in your kick," my smart little friend reminded him. "Unload it!"

"I'll give you ten of it," Bill sighed resignedly.

"Fifty or nothing," Danny held out.

"Take it," Bill yelled, dropping his bundle.

Then he climbed down—after Molly had been moved again, roaring and growling—to the greatest chorus of razzing I ever heard.

"That," Danny Dever remarked to

me with a broad grin, "ought to cure that cuckoo of practical jokes."

It ought to, yeah, but if I know Bill Tell it won't.

Hours later, after Molly had been caged and hauled away, Mike McGrath plodded back to the R Bar R with Clarence.

"Say! What's the matter? Why didn't you guys show up?" he asked Bill.

"Aw, shut up!" Bill grumbled at him and walked away.

"Well, darn me if you ain't a funny fellow," Mike complained.

Yes, ain't he funny?

## WHERE AIRPLANES FAILED

THERE is little danger that airplanes and machine guns will take the place of ponies and Winchesters in the hunting of fugitive bandits in western Texas, at least in the near future. In fact, these methods of warfare are a flat failure, in the opinion of about one hundred Texas peace officers.

Recently, four bandits raided the First National Bank of Cisco, killing two persons and shooting eight others. Escaping, then, the robbers led a posse of pursuers a four-day automobile chase, which ended near Southbend. Here there took place a pitched battle, in which one of the four was killed, and another wounded. Two of the band escaped, however, into the brush.

Almost certain that the two fugitives were cornered at a bend of the Brazos River, officers, nevertheless, sent out a call for more assistance. While rangers and sheriffs flocked into southern Young County, spurred on, in part, no doubt by the thought of the five-thousand-dollar reward offered by the Texas Bankers' Association for dead bandits, the bandits successfully remained hidden. The posse, the largest that west Texas has raised for years, hunted all day in vain.

So the next day, an airplane and two machine guns were employed. But this plan proved fruitless. Not only could the air patrollers see nothing on the ground because of the denseness of the cedar and rock oak forests along the Brazos River, but officers insist that the plane served as a warning to the bandits and kept them safely under cover. As for the machine guns, old-time sheriffs objected to the time taken in setting them up and, furthermore, they seemed to consider that one shot, well aimed, was as efficient and deadly as six hundred random shots a minute. So, if it is any comfort to them, bandits hiding in the wilds of the Brazos country may consider themselves, for the present at least, safe from patrolling airmen.

# That Biggest Fish~

By *Seth Ranger*

*Author of "Wild Law," etc.*

THE winter sun broke through the clouds and then by a piece of good fortune trickled among the towers of the network of office buildings and flooded the big window display. Scores of trolling spoons and spinners flashed silver, gold, and copper; the weave of the creels stood out sharply, and the rubber of hip boots took on a suggestion of life.

In the center of the display there stood a silver-and-gold cup with a relief figure of a fisherman playing a steelhead trout. Leaning against the tent pitched in one corner of the window was a fine steel-head rod and reel. The reel was filled with fine, powerful silk line to which was attached leader and hook, ready for use. A card contained the important information:

**First prize to the sportsman who displays the largest steelhead caught the opening day. Weights being equal, prize will be awarded to first man to arrive at our store.**

Outside the window the light caught the reddish-brown hair of an eighteen-year-old youth. He looked at the rod and cup with a thoughtful expression on his face. Occasionally he would tug at his jaw, as if wrestling with a problem. Within the store Joe Blake smiled, then, seeing the youth had no intention of entering, he stepped outside. "Well, 'Sparky,' think you can nose out Fogler this year?" he asked.

Sparky Morgan did not answer immediately. Except when directing a team on the football field, Morgan's conclusions were arrived at deliberately—the sure sign of the fisherman who ponders as he fishes. On the field he was the spark plug that made the team go, hence the nickname.

Joe Blake continued: "If either you or Fogler bring in the winning trout, the cup's gone. You haven't forgotten that three wins lands the mug, and you each have two. There's some mighty big names on it, too."

The cup had been on display for twelve years and each year the name of some well-known sportsman had been engraved on it.

Morgan confirmed all Blake said with a nod.

"Yeah, that's right, Joe, but it isn't so much winning the cup or the rod, though naturally I'd like 'em both—it's the name that goes with it. Part of the money that keeps me in school comes from guiding wealthy sportsmen to the good steelhead holes. When I win the big event, business is mighty good When I'm an also-ran it falls off." Again he pondered. "There's something wrong somewhere!"

Blake looked at him sharply. "Sparky," he said, "you are not inferring Fogler's not on the level?"

"No—it's not that! I can't understand what delays the fish getting up to the big holes until after the contest is over. Oh, yes, I know the fishing is good, but the big ones are not there! Last year, you remember, we had three weeks of almost steady rain, then a cold spell. The streams were low and the holes should have had the big ones, but they weren't there. It looked like anybody's race and—Fogler won."

Blake nodded. "Sparky, it makes no difference to us who wins the rod and the cup. We regard it as good advertising, but it does make a difference whether all have an even break. Fogler likes glory, and he's not the best fisherman in the world. We—er—ah, just between us, looked his entry over closely last year, but found no marks around the gills."

"I looked it over, too, and felt mean about it afterwards," Morgan admitted. "You know they can catch 'em in a gill net and by wrapping 'em in a wet grain sack all night remove the net marks." He shrugged his shoulders and glanced at the sun. "Rain's over! If it'll turn cold now and the streams go down, the boys will get some fish."

As he walked down the street, he was thoughtful. So others, also, were wondering about Fogler—Fogler with his fine, imported equipment; his love of being before the public eye; his uncanny ability to get what he went after in business and in sport. He was a great back-slapper and had what men called "a hair-trigger smile." In other words, he was ready to smile on the slightest occasion. The last two years, holding a steelhead in either hand, he had smiled broadly into the motion picture camera that supplied a news reel. There were also flashes of Joe Blake presenting him with the rod and the cup, which he was entitled to hold for one year.

As Sparky Morgan rounded the corner he ran into Fogler, who was eying the weather with critical interest. Fogler pulled the trigger and the smile was there. "Hello, Sparky," he said, with forced warmth, "likely-looking weather! It won't be long now!"

"Fine weather, Mr. Fogler," Morgan admitted. To himself he added, "You're right, it won't be long now."

The next day the weather was cold and the streams fell rapidly. It was late afternoon when Morgan worked his way down a steep bank and stopped beside a deep pool. With the utmost caution he squirmed out on a drift log and peered into the clear depths. Hanging close to the bottom were scores of steelhead—all small. He had followed the meanderings of the stream for nearly a mile when he was stopped by one of three private estates. The estates were posted, and as the stream ran through them it was impossible for Morgan to check up. The pools, however, were not regarded as good fishing. Most of them were too shallow and the water when not in the pools roared through a series of gorges. The estate in the center of the group was owned by Fogler, and each year he made a beautiful gesture. During the opening day of the steelhead season he not only permitted any

one who fished to fish on his own estate if they desired, but induced the adjoining property owners to make the same rule. Thus the stream was wide open.

"It makes him look like a good scout and maybe he is," Morgan growled, "but I don't understand why the big fellows loaf along. That isn't natural, something else is wrong."

Morgan turned back, worked his way upstream again, and inspected other holes. Other fishermen, some of whom had enjoyed the thrill of seeing their names engraved on the cup, were also looking over the holes. "Lots of little ones," one of them said. "What do you think, Sparky?"

"Yeah, lots of little ones!" He spoke mechanically. He was thinking again. Presently he became alert. He called two men who were in sight to join the one who had just spoken to him. "See that snag?" He asked, pointing to a log.

The log was about forty feet long and two feet thick at the butt. It had lodged in one of the best pools in the stream. The upper end was held in place by a small jam, the lower by two roots that protruded several feet and were themselves about four inches in thickness. The roots had grown around a boulder, the weight of which acted as a sort of ballast that kept the root side of the log downward. With this natural anchor, progress downstream had been slow.

"If someone hooks a steelhead," Morgan explained, "you can see what'll happen. The fish will start milling around that pool and, about the second time around, the line will catch on that root and the fish will break away. Let's move it now while we're together. Everything will leave the pool, but they'll come back to-night."

With several poles as levers, the log dislodged and started downstream. For nearly a quarter of a mile it floated with the roots up, then, going into white water, it rolled over and the roots began to drag. Every time a boulder was struck the log heaved upward, hesitated, then from the very force of the water moved onward. It roared through the gorges and pools of the three estates and came to a stop a mile or so below. A half hour after it stopped, Sparky Morgan was examining it. Despite the cold, he presently stripped off his clothing and with knife in hand dived deep into the pool. Twice he found it necessary to come up for air, but the third time he dragged a net with him. It was an unusual net anyway one cared to view it. The meshes were large enough to permit small and medium fish to pass through, uninjured, and small enough to stop the large fish.

Caught by the gills, and dead—no doubt for several days—was one of the largest steelheads Sparky had ever seen. He removed the trout and watched it float downstream. Then he dressed, gathered up the net, and carried it to the car he had borrowed to reach the stream.

Sparky Morgan did not stop until he reached Fogler's city home. The house, which was said to have cost a hundred thousand dollars, was located on a broad boulevard and surrounded by grounds that were well cared for and beautifully laid out. He stopped his battered car in front of the main entrance and ran lightly up the steps. He had been in fine houses before and the experience held no terrors for him. A butler greeted him.

"I want to see Mr. Fogler," announced Sparky.

"Mr. Fogler is dining at present."

"You tell him Sparky Morgan is out here and has something for him. Tell him if he don't feel like dropping his knife and fork long enough to come out and get it that I'll leave it at Jonas & Spidell's sporting goods store and he can call for it there."

The butler retired and a moment later Fogler came out, pulled the trigger, and released a smile. "Yes, Sparky?" he queried.

"Just wipe that smile off your face, Fogler," the youth retorted, "I'm sick of seeing it because it don't mean a thing. I've got something of yours out in the car. Wait, I'll get it." He ran down the steps, dived into the rear of the car, and brought out the net. "Pretty slick scheme, stopping the big ones. They couldn't get upstream, Fogler, so naturally they hung around pools that nobody would think of fishing in. You had a cinch. It took me some time to figure it out, but I did. Now, don't go to bawling out the watchman at your country estate. He was very much on the job and I knew I couldn't get a peek at it; couldn't set foot on the property. You overlooked two things—one was my knowledge of the habits of fish; the other was the fact that the big ones go upstream along with the little ones."

"Yes?" The hair-trigger smile was gone. The man was icy; his mature mind measuring the youth's.

"Yes!" Morgan continued. "So I sent the snag downstream and cleared it of obstructions. Then I followed the snag to see what it had picked up. Here's your net!"

"Morgan," Fogler said coldly, "what is your price?" He drew out his check book. "This can't get out!"

"No, it won't get out, but if you try to slip me a check I'll swing on you, if it's the last thing I do!"

Fogler was puzzled. Presently his face brightened. "I see, Morgan, you wish me to keep out of the contest. Well, I guess I'll have to now. The cup's yours."

Sparky Morgan shook his head. "For a grown-up man who's made a lot of money, Mr. Fogler, you haven't much sense. You'll stay in the contest because I want the fun of beating you. That's what you'll hate worse than anything else. You're going to fish on the opening day and take a chance along with the others; you're going to display the fish you catch, and you're going to like it. Otherwise, I'll tell about the net."

With that Morgan ran down the steps and sped away. He wanted a pleasanter atmosphere than that surrounding Fogler.

The latter gathered up the net, still damp from the stream, and entered the house. The sooner it was out of sight the better! Then he fell to thinking. Morgan was queer, he reflected, he would work like a slave for a few dollars and turn down a chance to make a thousand. And Fogler would have paid just that for silence. He did not finish his dinner; the affair had spoiled his desire for food, but he did do a lot of thinking. "I can beat him at that," he mused, "and with the net in my hands, who'll believe him? Yes, I think I can win that cup."

The usual announcement was made in the newspapers the evening before the opening day. The Fogler and adjoining estates on Kenai Creek were open to those who wished to fish along the banks. And nobody cared to fish there because, supposedly, the pools were not large enough to hold the big ones.

Fogler and Sparky Morgan were no exceptions. The former, no longer having the advantage, was on the stream ahead of the youth and he watched the course he took before deciding on his own. Not that Morgan was always right, but he was considered the best guide in the country when it came to steelhead fishing, and that was good enough for Fogler.

Morgan crossed the stream on a down tree, climbed the trail on the other side and vanished in the heavy timber.

"Granite Pool!" Fogler exclaimed. He sent his car over a skid road to a point near the pool, then gave his driver orders to turn around and head out, while he cut through the timber.

Day was just breaking when he worked his way down the bank, broke

through the ice coating on shallow, backwater pools and crawled over the worn granite bed to the edge of the pool.

And what a pool it was! Fully two hundred feet wide and nearly three hundred feet long, hemmed in by granite walls and fed by white water that rushed through courses that time had cut in the granite bottom. Winter floods had cleared the pool of débris and the bottom was visible at a depth of twenty feet.

He peered down and saw a dozen or so great steelheads. They seemed to hover several feet off bottom, like balloons over a city. He tossed a square of fresh salmon eggs into the nearest water. It vanished, spilled over the falls, and a second later one of the trout moved ahead and then drifted back.

"They're taking 'em!" he cried.

A sound behind him caught his ear. He looked up. Sparky Morgan had arrived. He did not smile; merely nodded. Morgan acknowledged it with a nod as brief. Then Fogler spoke.

"I'm here first, Morgan, and——"

"Yes, I know, and a good sportsman won't fish in another fellow's pool. You're here because you waited to see where I was going. I didn't see you, but I heard your car. I won't bother you, Fogler. This is really two pools. The stream divides a half mile up and comes together here. You just tossed a chunk of eggs into the South Fork, is that the one you're fishing in?"

"Yes!" As Fogler answered he wondered how Morgan would cross. The latter dropped down below the pool, rolled a log into the stream, and with the aid of a pole shot across. By the time he had reached shore and was working his way back, Fogler had made his first cast. The line grew stiff with the frost even as it shot out. The eggs and sinkers vanished; his pole bent violently, then slackened abruptly.

"Fogler lost him!" Morgan panted. He was baiting his hook as he ran. The well-oiled reel was in perfect working order. It sang merrily as Sparky sent the bait out. The bait dropped in the water, just above the falls, and was sucked to the depths of the pool. "You never get 'em the first cast," he muttered, "it's generally—Wow!"

From a low hum the reel's song increased to a beautiful tenor. The pole bent double, and above the roar of falling water came Fogler's voice. "Keep him on your own side of the stream! Don't scare those on my side! It'd be just like you."

"Shut up, Fogler, when have I ever played a dirty game? And I could have played it the other night if I'd wanted to! Quit your yowling, and see if you can hook a bigger one. There are plenty down there—all of those you had blocked with your net!"

Morgan could not get back an inch of line. Far below the surface something heavy, almost like a log, was moving round and round as if in an eddy.

The sun, which had just caught the tips of the snow-capped peaks, dropped slowly to the dark green of the fir tops; a shaft of light struck the pool, and faint mist, or perhaps it was drifting spray from the fall, began to gather.

Fogler cast twice without result. He was too anxious to beat Morgan. The next time he moved slowly, dropping the bait high above, so that it would drag along the bottom and come down behind the falls, where some of the big boys were doubtless waiting. It did not seem likely that his bait could have reached bottom before the slack vanished. His reel screamed, then the line slackened. Fogler took in the slack. Then he glanced over at Morgan. The youth had just met a rush that took most of his line. As his line slackened, he kept it tight by running backwards, winding in as he ran. Again the trout made a rush, and this time he broke water. For a moment he stood in mid-air, flashing in the sunlight, a thing of silver,

splashed with a trace of the rainbow, consumed by fury. Then he was gone, and the reel screamed again. He stopped somewhere in the depths and sulked. Morgan stirred him to action and he circled the pool, narrowly missing taking a turn around Fogler's line.

"Keep away from my line, don't foul me!" Fogler roared.

"Shut up! I've got the biggest trout right now. Think I want to foul anything?"

Morgan was reeling in the line. It came inch by inch. The silver fury was sulking again, thinking about the strange power that remained with him regardless of what move he made. Then Morgan saw him—two feet below the surface; fins moving slowly, gills sucking in and out. The sun struck him and the splash of the rainbow along his side deepened. Then, with a flirt of his tail, he was gone.

Fifteen minutes passed, then twenty. Morgan worked downstream and the trout, curiously enough, turned and went with the current. The line sawed on a sharp rock and, seeing it, Fogler's eyes lighted with hope. No line, holding such weight, could stand that long. To break the angle and ease the strain, Morgan leaped into the icy water. He followed his trout into white water, then began reclaiming the line once more. From a hundred feet he drew it in, inch by inch, until it became a scant ten. The trout, tired, drifted to within a few feet of where he stood. With a gaff hook——

But Morgan never carried a gaff hook. It was his one superstition. Taking one suggested that a big fish would be caught and the hook necessary. He refused to jinx his luck. The same was true of a landing net. He glanced upstream to note how Fogler was progressing. He had just netted his catch.

"A peach!" Morgan muttered, "it'll go eighteen pounds—maybe more!"

Then he was busy with his own catch. The silver fury got over his sulk and went into the white water. Again and again he broke the surface, splashing back, letting the current and his efforts combined break the line if possible. And always the trembling tip of the pole stopped the rush—a rush, which if the pole were rigid, would have torn the hook from the mouth or snapped the line.

Morgan's wrists were tired from the fight. Again he fought for the line. And this time it came easier. Six feet remained; then five. He drew the trout over his boot and gave it a kick. It landed, flopping, high on the clean sand of a bar; still a silver fury; still flashing in the sunlight.

Fogler drew from his pocket a tiny set of scales, hooked the dressed steelhead on, and glanced at the figures. He whistled. "Twenty-one pounds and three ounces! That settles it. I knew they'd run big, but not that big!" Again he whistled. Then, slinging the fish over his back he began climbing the trail. It was a cinch for him now. Morgan was still struggling with his fish. He must struggle down the rough river-bed for nearly a mile to his car: or else cross the stream, climb the bank and take an easier, yet longer, route over a good trail. Fogler grinned and it was no hair-trigger grin. It came right from the heart. On the way out he'd swing by Paterson's ranch and have Ole telephone in and notify Jacklin of the news reel. Might as well make the most of it. There would be a crowd around, waiting. There was always a crowd to witness the arrival of the first deer; the first string of ducks or upland birds; the first steelhead, and the first basket of trout.

Fogler was puffing heavily as he reached the top of the bank. There was no trail, and some of the way he had to pull himself up by branches. At the top he glanced back. Morgan was just

shoving the log into the water. He reflected that the current would carry him some distance downstream—distance he would have to retrace before he could climb the bank to the trail. Then he plunged into the timber.

Presently he drew an automatic pistol and fired into the air. It was answered by the horn of his automobile. He changed his course and, guided by the horn, made several short cuts. He tossed the prize onto the floor and dropped weakly into the back seat.

"Dig out!" he panted to the chauffeur. "I've got the largest fish, and I want to be first there. I want others to come with their catches, take one look at mine, and then sneak away."

The car bumped over the skid road, each jolt threatening to break a spring. Presently they came to a winding gravel road that led sharply downward and crossed the stream. There was a rut at the bridge and cars always slowed down the second time they crossed—if the first crossing wasn't enough. As he neared the rut, the driver glanced upstream, then cried out.

Coming down the middle of the river on a log, with the white water roaring about him, was Sparky Morgan. The calks of his boots were biting into the wood. He had a pack slung over his back—a pack with a heavy, damp weight. He shot under the bridge and came out on the other side, missed being spilled into the river by a narrow margin, and vanished around a bend.

Startled fishermen looked up and wondered who was crazy enough to drive the turns at such a reckless speed. Recognizing Fogler, they understood when Sparky Morgan came leaping downstream on a log. They forgave any scares he might have given the fish when they saw the grin on his face and the weighty pack on his back.

Fogler roared as he passed the ranch, and Peterson understood for he waved. The Swede did not see the athletic, tense figure on the log a quarter of a mile ahead of the car. Twice the car skidded into a ditch in attempting a turn at too high a speed; but each time it leaped out.

As Fogler passed his own summer home a battered car, such as high-school students glory in, lurched into the highway. Morgan, dripping wet, hatless and determined, was at the wheel.

"Pass him and ditch him!" Fogler shouted. The big car swung around the smaller; the rear wheel scraping Morgan's front wheel. The little car went into the ditch, then out again. The big car faded into the forest a half mile away.

"The race isn't over," Morgan growled, "and it won't be over until I drop that silver fury on the scales that Joe Blake's holding."

The crowd gave a cheer as the big car came to a stop, with squeaking brakes. There was the camera, grinding away, getting the action. It continued to grind as Fogler opened the door.

"Hold up your steelhead," Jacklin shouted, "now come toward the camera slowly and keep smiling. You're first!"

"What a beauty!" some one yelled.

The crowd milled about Fogler as he swung into the store, and it seemed to overflow everything inside of the building.

"Blake! Joe Blake!" Fogler cried at the top of his lungs. "I'm first. And I've got the winning trout!"

Joe Blake came from behind the counter. "No, Fogler," he answered, "you're not first. Sparky Morgan came in the back way with a steelhead that weighed an even twenty-two pounds. You'd have been first here if you hadn't stopped for cheers. At that you may win. What does your trout weigh?"

Fogler turned sharply on his heel. "Not enough," he snapped, as he vanished in the crowd that had just cheered him.

# Metals of the West

## (Quicksilver)

*By Thomas R. Best*

MERCURY, commonly called quicksilver, is an oddity among metals. It is seldom in metallic form, since a temperature of about 40° below zero is required to solidify it. It flows readily at ordinary temperature, and can be divided into minute particles, each of which assumes the same globular shape and will roll around like shot. These particles will rejoin into one cohesive mass when brought into contact.

Quicksilver is heavier than iron, copper, or lead, and a nail will float readily on its surface. The weight of an ordinary cupful will astonish any one not familiar with this strange metal.

The mining of quicksilver is similar to that of other metals, since it occurs in veins or fissures. The principal ore is called cinnabar, which, when high grade, is characterized by its deep red color.

The largest production in the United States has been from the Coast Range of California—another notable fact, since this region does not yield other metals except in very small quantities. The most famous quicksilver mine in the world is at Almaden, Spain, which has produced the metal for several hundred years. So when the Spaniards discovered quicksilver in California more than a hundred years ago, they named the prospective mine "New Almaden." This mine, about twelve miles from San José, has yielded more than half the quicksilver of the West. It was worked continuously from 1846—when it was "denounced," as Mexico calls the recording of a mining claim—until recent years, making it one of the oldest mines in the West. More than one hundred miles of underground workings were necessary to extract the ore. The present company is taking quicksilver from the El Senador mine on the same property, four miles from the old mine. Ore is now being taken from the fourteen-hundred-foot level.

Another productive mine is the New Idria in San Benito County, less than one hundred miles southeast of New Almaden. This also is the namesake

of a famous European mine—the Idria. in Illyria, in the late Austrian Empire, now included in Italy's domain. The New Idria has become the leading quicksilver mine of the West, since the exhaustion of the New Almaden.

These two mines, together with the Cloverdale in Sonoma County, California, and the Chisos in western Texas, yield nearly all the quicksilver mined in America. Small quantities are taken from Oregon, Nevada, and Arizona.

Quicksilver is sold by the "flask," an iron bottle with a screw top, which holds seventy-five pounds, or two quarts or so in bulk of the liquid metal. The days when the Comstock Lode yielded its great bonanzas was the prosperous era of quicksilver mining. Every ounce of the hundreds of millions of dollars in gold and silver was recovered from the pulp and slime by quicksilver, and though, theoretically, mercury can be used over and over again, losses were heavy and much of it went "dead," as the miners called it. Consequently, new supplies were required constantly and eighty thousand flasks were produced in a single year in the late '70s, most of it being used in gold and silver amalgamation in the various mining districts of the West. In its day, the New Almaden mine produced a million flasks, valued at fifty million dollars.

Since cyanide treatment has taken the place of quicksilver in extracting gold and silver, production has declined until only ten thousand flasks are produced yearly. California yields about seven hundred flasks a month; Texas, one hundred and twenty-five, and Nevada, fifty.

The price during seventy years has ranged from thirty-four to ninety-eight dollars a flask, though running well over one hundred dollars for a short time during the World War. In one period of 1916, quotations were as high as three hundred dollars. The manufacture of fulminate for percussion caps—the largest present-day use of mercury—was the cause of this demand. The price to-day is around eighty-three dollars a flask, which leaves but little profit.

Other uses of quicksilver, besides the familiar one in thermometers, are for dentistry—in amalgam fillings—for certain industries, as special purpose paints, and in medicine. The formerly better-known calomel is a preparation of mercury, as is corrosive sublimate—used as an antiseptic and for curing pelts. Indians use cinnabar for their ornamental paint. Lighthouse beacons revolve in quicksilver.

The extraction of quicksilver is simple as compared with that of certain other metals. A moderate-sized plant suffices for the New Almedan Company. The ore is broken into pieces an inch or two in diameter, and is fed into a rotary furnace. Here it is subjected to from 500° to 600° of heat, centigrade—or about 1,000° F.—which vaporizes the mercury. The vapor is carried into an adjoining tank, where it is treated to remove the dust that is picked up with it, and then is passed on to the condenser, where it becomes the liquid metal. Ore containing less than one per cent can be mined profitably, when the price is not too low.

Quicksilver was known to the ancients, and was a favorite of the alchemist in the Middle Ages—when men endeavored to change base metal into gold. Experiments along this line apparently have not ceased, for the news columns have recently contained items to the effect that scientists in Japan and Germany have actually produced gold from mercury.

# The Round-Up

STORIES of all kinds, having to do with the great outdoors, have been told round this here fire every week, but get ready for a snake yarn that overlays and overlaps any pipe-dream animal story that ever floated over these flames about which we're gathered.

Nesuahchnum, is the name of the gent that's goin' to spin this narrative. Leastways, that's what he calls his self. He hails from Deer Park, Washington. Now hark ye, while he rattles, squirms, and wriggles:

"Boss and Folks: Some time back, at a meetin' here, there was some talk about snakes, made by R. A. N., Box 17, Enfaula, Oklahoma. Now I'd like to contribute an experience I had with a big snake while on a Southern trip last spring. I have run over snakes with my heavy machine on the highways north and south, but I'll do that no more if I can help it.

"While traveling through the desert, I ran over a very large snake which was crossing the highway. When I hit that snake with my left wheels, I heard a loud hissing sound and I was surprised at the powerful hiss of the snake; the next moment I made the discovery that I had a puncture, judging by the crazy action of my car. I stopped as soon as possible to change tires. Looking over my wheels I found both tires down flat. Not knowing yet what had caused both punctures, I went for my tools; then came round the machine again to put the jack under the axle.

"I thought I was seeing one of those desert mirages. The flat tire I was looking at had changed its original blue-gray color to a greenish yellow, like the color of a snake; looking at the other tire, I saw it had the same appearance. My good tires, I noticed, had their original color. Well, I went to work to change the flats for my spares, and as soon as I touched the flat tires, I felt them to be very soft, just as if all the life of the rubber had been taken out!

"After the work was done, I gathered up my tools, and was thinking about the snake, when I saw the same monster coming down the road in my direction! Now I am not a coward, but I had no gun, no club, or stones suitable for weapons, and my monkey wrench did not seem big enough to hit the snake with; so, under the circumstances, I thought it best not to

continue the argument! I saw the snake only about ten feet away, still coming, so I jumped in my car and lost no time in driving off.

"I had plenty of food for thought till I reached the next settlement. There I gave a mechanic the job of fixing my tires, without telling him my snake story. As soon as the man saw and touched the tires, he said to me: 'Well, the snake did get the best of you this time.' Examination showed that the inside red tubes had also changed to a greenish-yellow color and had the same characteristics as the tires.

"The mechanic said: 'It will cost you more than the regular price to have this job done.' I asked what I should do. He said, 'The same thing that you would do if you were bitten. Do you know what's good for snake bite?' I said: 'I'd take good whisky if I were bitten.' He said: 'The same thing is good for the tires, but wood alcohol will do.' So we submerged the tires and tubes for twenty-five minutes in wood alcohol, after which they were as good as ever, in color and elasticity.

"The mechanic was snakewise. All the stories he told me about snakes, while fixing up my tires, would fill a book. Nine out of ten would not believe those stories, but seeing is believing, as the man from Missouri says. The strange part of it is, those snake bitten and alcohol-soaked tires are, today, as good as new, and give no sign of wearing out, while their mates bought at the same time, have long since been replaced.

"Now I am something of a philosopher, and whenever I hear, in a discussion about prohibition, that alcohol is very harmful and destroys everything, I take the prohibitionist by the arm, lead him to my car, and show him my alcohol-soaked tires and tell him my story. I have, so far, converted nine prohibitionists to the other side of the fence. I have made up my mind to give my other tires an alcohol bath in the near future and am sure it'll prove a good investment. But I am off of snakes."

Here is another one of them there fast-sendin' wire boys, L. W. Salisbury, Albany, New York. Listen to his click:

"DEAR BOSS AND FOLKS: On reading the Round-up in the issue of January 21st, I noticed the letter by Phil D. of Butte, Montana.

"I want to say I agree with Phil. Being a telegrapher myself and having worked some fast wires, my ears are pretty keen, but I should like to have any one, regardless of who it was, listen to a six-gun being fanned by the fastest gunman in the country, and, providing his ears are keen enough, listen to a telegraph instrument. Then let the gunman fan five shots and then have an operator send a letter P, which is five dots. I'll say this; by the time the gunman fanned two shots, the operator would have sent the P, and I am sure that if a man could hear the dots in half the time on the key, why he surely ought to be able to tell how many times a gun is fanned.

"I have often gone on the rifle range where the boys have automatics and listened to them. To some, it was impossible to tell how many times one certain gun was fired, but I never had any trouble that way, for my ears are trained for it. To my way of thinking, a six-gun is very slow compared to a telegraph instrument, especially in a press office."

"To some," he says, "it was impossible to tell how many times a certain gun was fired." Looks like it takes a wire boy to count 'em. 'Course, not always, if you've got the ear for it.

Listen here to some more good words for Calamity Jane. S. L. Scotti, Flint, Michigan, R. R. 8, speaks 'em:

"Boss and Folks: In answer to inquiries concerning our Calamity Jane, and especially in answer to H. M. Seaman's letter of April 9, 1927, I should like to know why men cannot say good things of dead women and not give the public the impression that they were all wrong. Knowing Calamity Jane as I did, being born fifty years ago in the Black Hills of South Dakota, and having come in contact with this woman, I can write a great deal about her, as well as about old-timers such as Dick Clark, known as 'Deadwood Dick,' and Bill Hickok, known as 'Wild Bill.'

"Calamity Jane was married in girlhood, had a daughter, and, being left a widow, in order to educate this daughter, she turned her hand to the most paying game of the wild country of South Dakota—that of punching bulls. And a better driver of ox teams never cracked a whip. Dressed as a man, she feared neither man, beast, or Satan, and, when the smallpox ravished the mining camps of the Black Hills, Calamity Jane was the one to whom many an old miner owed his life. Among the old school, to say a hard word of Calamity, was to invite dire trouble.

"When the end came for Calamity, she came back to her former stamping ground and was taken in at Bellefourche, where she was cared for till the end drew near. Then a few of the old school took her to Deadwood, where she lies beside Wild Bill, a former sweetheart. As for her being a dance hall girl, I never knew of it. And so I could go on and tell of dozens of good things about that well-known figure, Calamity Jane."

# THE WEST

## *And What Do YOU Know About It?*

1. How does the Canadian asbestos differ from that found in the United States?..... 2. Who was Captain Bonneville?..... 3. What is scheelite?..... 4. Of what use is scheelite?..... 5. What Western city was nearly wiped out by fire for the second time in 1850?..... 6. Name the nine most important gold-producing States in the United States..... 7. Who discovered and named Mt. Rainier?..... 8. How many days did it take the first stagecoach to reach Denver, en route from Leavenworth?..... 9. What fur company organized in 1809 was the leader in Western exploration for ten years?..... 10. The Columbia River was discovered by.....in the year.....

*Answers to last week's questions:* 1. One of the most common lead ores, often carrying silver in varying amounts. 2. Beans and bacon. 3. Arizona. 4. A common mineral with a greasy luster, ranging in color from olive to blackish-green. 5. Serpentine. 6. Toward his tail. 7. So that with the left foot in the stirrup, when the horse starts the rider is better able to swing into the saddle. 8. The frog. 9. Fibrous. 10. At Quebec.

**Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.**

ALTHOUGH there is a demand for letters from everywhere, there seems to be an ever-increasing cry for more and more of the kind that come from the land of "sage and sand." So, folks, let the "purple sage gang" come forward with their messages from the West.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I've been in most every State in the Union some time during my twenty-seven years—including, what I think, is one of the coldest of our States—Minnesota. I'm greatly interested in the West and Northwest, but most of all I'd like to hear from the purple sage gang. I have hopes of building myself a ranch home out in that direction some day. I know the thrill of sleeping in a blanket under the stars, of cooking meals over a camp fire, and all that goes with the outdoor life. I'm crazy about it.

Wake up, you of the purple sage gang, and let's hear from you. MRS. M. F. P.
Care of The Tree.

South Bend, Indiana.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a different sort of a waddy. I ride a different sort of a critter from the regulation broncs. I give her the gun. A couple of bumps and I'm off to ride herd on the clouds. You waddies of the range who are hankerin' to know a little about ridin' one of these here brutes, just let me know, and I'll sure drop you a line.

M. J. MCGROGAN.
604 East Washington Street, South Bend, Indiana.

Another Indianan.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I hail from Indiana and would like to hear from some one in the Northwest—a trapper, forest ranger, or cowboy. I expect to travel through the West a bit this summer and hope to meet up with some of the outdoor enthusiasts. I spend a great deal of my time in the woods here, hunting and trapping. By the way, folks, I'm twenty-one. GEORGE POOL.
Box 42, Sardinia, Indiana.

Wants pal for motor-camping trip.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm starting on a motor-camping tour of the United States this spring and want a good honest pal along with me. One of the kind who doesn't get tired of camp life after the first few days.

I've already traveled by motor through twenty-six States, and I believe I shall finally locate in the West or Southwest. I'd be very glad to hear from Gangsters located in either section, telling me of the opportunities that are awaiting an ambitious fellow who would care to locate permanently.

During my trip I'd like to meet some of

the Gangsters and perhaps enjoy a hunting trip with them. BILL MORRIS.
Box 47, Mishawaka, Indiana.

## This Gangster will ride twenty-seven miles for your letter.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Our ranch is twenty-seven miles back from the highway, in the hills, and it's quite a trip, as it has to be made by horseback.

I can ride most any mean horse, and can take my place with the men hereabouts at long-distance shooting. I love the outdoor sports, but even so I get lonesome for Pen Pals of my own age, and I'd like to hear from the girls of the Gang who are nineteen or over. That twenty-seven miles will be nothing to me if I have some letters waiting for me at the end of the trip. Here's hoping for a full mail box.

MABEL SANSBURG.
Care of Fred Sansburg, Laytonville, Mendocino County, California.

## Texan.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a native of Texas and have never been out of the State. I'd like Pen Pals from Alaska, Canada, South America, and from any place in the West. I'm seventeen, hombres, and interested in athletics.

IVAN H. SAWYERS.
Box 5, Palmer, Texas.

## Welcome, South American.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I parted with my Argentine only last year, and I am very pleased with my new country. I have toured in Asia and in Europe, and I am now in the United States to continue my studies in aviation. I'm eighteen, and to any one who writes I will tell of Buenos Aires, which is the Paris of South America, or about any other country that my Pen Pals are interested in.

RUDOLFO DE VALERIO.
25 Arlington Avenue, No. 4, Santa Barbara, California.

## Cactus Kate.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: You-all remember M. T. H., and his verse that went like this:

I thought the cowboy brave and strong,
But now I wonder how
A man with such a noble heart
Can punch a poor old cow.

This here verse by M. T. H. needs an answer, and here 'tis.

That tenderfoot jasper M. T. H.
Shore made a crooked song.
Jest ask that waddy at the corral gates,
He'll tell yuh that hombre's all wrong.
For when it's moonlight on the range,
With cowses closely bunched,
Listen, hombre M. T. H.,
Those cows has gotta be punched!

CACTUS KATE.
Care of The Tree.

**No matter whether you range afar or stay within the invisible fence lines of your own town or State, be sure that you wear your badges, folks.**

**Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.**

"The Hollow Tree Gangsters are people after my own heart," says Miss M. F. Bowstead, 195 Brownell Street, Fall River, Massachusetts. This Gangster has never been West, but she reads all the information she can get about the great outdoors. She's looking for more Western information, folks, and she's coming to the right place to find it. Don't disappoint her, Gangsters."

"I'm a New York girl of twenty-one who has hopes of going out West soon," says Lottie Sheppey, 115 Fleet Street, Forest Hills, Long Island, New York. This Gangster not only promises to take care of all letters received, but will exchange snapshots as well.

Billie Wright, Route 3, Columbia, Missouri, is a sixteen-year-old girl who lives on a farm five miles from Columbia, on United States Highway No.

40. This Gangster spends her summer vacations swimming and horseback riding.

"I was born on a ranch, so I don't think I'm exactly a tenderfoot," says Grace Poggi, 942 East Mountain Street, Glendale, California. This Gangster would like to go to Arizona if there is a ranch out that way that's looking for a ranch-house helper. Cowgirls, please get in touch with her.

Eunice Foster, Box 1386, Drumright, Oklahoma, is a lonely Oklahoma girl who finds the little Western oil town a bit dull. She invites your correspondence, girls.

"I have always lived in sunny California, although I've traveled through Arizona and Nevada," says Mary Jane Forbes, San Luis Obispo, California. Her address is 106 Santa Rosa Street. This Gangster is sixteen and wants girls of the Gang to put her on their correspondence list.

Lena Tucker, Canaan Center, New Hampshire, is seventeen and lives on a farm. She would like to hear from the Hollow Tree sisters in every State.

"I'm a musician and would like very much to communicate with another man in my profession," says Stanley Kinney, 204 Newhall Street, New Haven, Connecticut. Western hombres, will be very welcome pen pals to this new Gangster.

Harold C. Kasper, 2937 Southport Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, is nineteen and want Pen Pals from all over the good old United States. This is covering a good deal of territory, but he says he'll answer all letters written to him.

Don't overlook Uncle Sam's boys, folks.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a marine in the Republic of Haiti. I want to offer snapshots of this beautiful country as an inducement to would-be Pen Pals. My age is twenty, but I'll be glad to hear from young or old.

PRIVATE H. COURTNEY.
First Brigade Headquarters, Headquarters Company, Port au Prince. Care of Postmaster, New York.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I can give you the word of a marine that each and every letter I receive will be answered, and here's hoping that I get "snowed under" by them. I'm stationed in Port au Prince, Haiti—rather a lonely place for one who is used to plenty of friends. By the way, I'm from the South, and would appreciate hearing from that section of the country, especially Alabama, for that is my home. W. B. HEARN.
Care of Marine Post Office, Port au Prince, Haiti.

"We are two soldiers who are stationed on an island out in the Boston harbor," say Robert McLeish and Roland Gelinas. Don't forget, hombres, that it's up to you to make the days less monotonous for these Gangsters. Address them at Station Hospital, Fort Strong, Boston, Massachusetts.

"I'm just a lonely Gangster who's traveled through most of the States and finally ended up in the army in the Hawaiian Islands," says John L. White, Battery E, 13th Field Artillery, Schofield Barracks, Honolulu, Hawaii.

D. L. Underwood, Box 15, U. S. S. *Pennsylvania*, San Pedro, California, is a sailor. He has many interesting experiences to relate.

A Southern Gangster.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: There's one State I'm most genuinely proud of, and that's Florida. I'm a-livin' in Palatka, thirty miles from St. Augustine, our oldest city. I can tell many interesting stories about our old town, and I have a lot of snapshots, too.

Two years ago I spent several months in the Everglades, and sure can tell you-all some mighty interestin' tales about that there part of the earth. I've also something to say about the South Sea Islands. Yes, folks, I know the South pretty well. No, I'm not old—only twenty-five. Any more questions you'd like to ask? Come right ahead. I'm not holdin' back my address.

N. B. BISHOP.
123 North First Street, Palatka, Florida.

# WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

by John North

**It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.**

**Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.**

AN old-timer who knows Alaska well has written me such an entertaining letter about that frontier that I'm hereby going to share it with all you hombres who are interested.

"In thinking or writing about Alaska," says A. A. S., of Pacific Grove, California, "you must divide that country into three parts. First, the southeast coast between the coast range and the Pacific Ocean, with its heavy rain and snowfall; second, the western coast along the Bering Sea and Arctic and Pacific Oceans, with the moderate snowfall and rainfall, with thick snow crust and easy trails, and strong, bleak, blustering storms of rain, sleet and snow; third, the central portion, the whole of the Yukon watershed and Kuskokwim. The latter is the section I know best, having spent four years near the mouth of the Tanana on the Yukon River.

"One of the most interesting sights of that great and interesting territory is the freezing and thawing of this mighty river each year, a description of which I have never seen in print. Therefore, I shall try in this letter to tell you all about it. At the mouth of the Tanana River, where it empties into the Yukon, the Yukon flows clear from main bank to main bank and is fully a mile in width and of an average depth of about twelve feet, flowing at a rate of about five miles per hour at low water and eight at extreme high water. So you see a few gallons of water go by every day!

"The first frosts usually occur about the tenth of September, and each day thereafter seems to be a degree or so colder until the temperature is below freezing. Then usually a strong wind comes roaring down the river raising waves and white caps. Small crystals form in the water, later closing together and making blocks or cakes. As they go floating down the river new crystals

join on and the cakes get larger and larger as they go by. These new crystals form small raised ridges all around the outer edge of each cake, leaving the center always a little lower. The wind drives water over this ridge, filling the center, where it freezes, thickening and strengthening the cakes constantly.

"The cakes are also constantly growing larger in size and numbers. This goes on from day to day, sometimes for many weeks, owing to how fast the cold weather increases, until the whole river is filled with these floating island-like cakes of ice. Some of these may be more than an acre in extent. Many of them are stranded along the shores of the river. At this time of the year the river is low and there is in most places more or less of a stone course, a slightly sloping beach, back of which is a steep bank. While the cakes have been forming in the main river, the water along the shore and in the shallow sloughs and eddies has been forming solid ice from top to bottom until it is two feet or more thick. Remember that the river is at extreme low water at this time.

"Somewhere down the river, when no more cakes can form or flow, there comes a jam. Then there is a mighty crushing of cakes together, a terrific pressure that forces great slabs upward. In forcing cake against cake as they come down the river the mass is pushed back until the whole river is closed. It is a mighty rough surface where these ice cakes have joined and been lifted upward. As the river closes, it forms a dam that forces the water back and it lifts the whole body of ice upward. Cracks form along the solid ice next the shore and the water overflows the shore ice and freezes there, leaving a level, smooth surface. This bench of ice thus formed along the shore is the winter trail route.

"After this the ice in the main stream gradually settles, as the flow of water falls to low depth. There is a well-defined crack all along the shore at the point where the shore or beach ice is frozen down to the bottom. In order to cross the river at any point for any purpose during the winter it is always necessary to break down the rough ice in the main channel in order to make a trail sufficient for sled and snowshoes. The snow that falls in the Yukon watershed during the winter does not crust. It can hardly be called snow it is so light and fluffy—as light as down feathers. The heavy Canadian snowshoe is practically worthless in this kind of snow. Even with the large Alaskan shoe a person sinks from six to twelve inches where there is no trail at each step.

"At the beginning of March each year the melting of the snow and ice begins, thawing during the daytime and freezing again at night as long as frost continues. The melting gains more and more headway as the days lengthen. By the middle of April all the snow on the lower levels has been melted. The smaller lakes and little streams are now free of ice. The ice in the larger rivers and lakes is quite honeycombed and getting dangerous for travel, and the ice along the shores that formed the bench has been melted away.

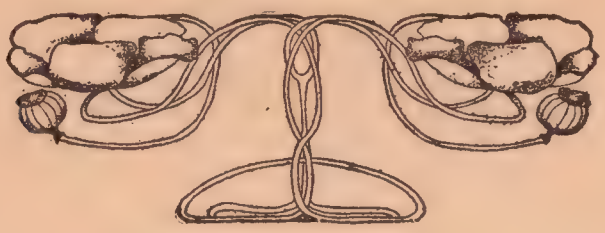
"About the first of April the ice in the Tanana and larger Yukon tributaries breaks, and the whole body of ice in them passes down and under the ice in the Yukon. The ice in the main channel of the Yukon at this time touches neither shore. It lies there like a dead or sleeping monster. It is six feet or more thick and a mile wide. It staggers one's imagination to think of the tremendous power of this nightmare of ice—nearly three thousand miles of solid ice. The river during all this period of preparation for opening has shown little indication of a rise.

"The final breaking of the ice

comes each year somewhere between the seventh and twenty-eighth of May, according to whether the season is early or late. When the break comes, it descends with a sudden rush and a deafening roar. As it breaks and the ice begins to move down stream, the river quickly rises and gathers force, hurling mass of ice against mass of ice. This rise in the river may be as rapid as twenty feet in twenty minutes until the high banks back of the beach are running full or even higher. It is a terrific sight to behold this tumbling, crushing, flowing mass of ice.

"Gradually, after the first shock of opening, it all quiets down and for about a week there is a steady passing of ice of all sizes down stream. Then the mighty river is free and clear for the coming of the steamboats. Such is the freezing and opening of the Yukon."

And while we're talking about Alaska, I'll just say that I have some up-to-date facts about the gold mines up that way which I'll be mighty glad to send to anybody who's interested enough to write for them.



## SAVED BY THREE HEROES

WHEN Miss Bessie Howe, a government school-teacher, shot herself accidentally, she had the distinction of being rescued by three heroes, one of whom worked independently of the other two.

The accident occurred at Ninilchic, an Indian village on Cook's Inlet, Alaska. The village, which was snowbound, is about one hundred miles from Anchorage, Alaska. Walter Kotoff, a former Russian radio operator, started out from the village on snowshoes to send for aid from a near-by ranch. Several times he gave his message over the ranch radio set; but the set had a limited range, and Kotoff feared that his request might not be heard. So he set out once more for Seldovia, fighting his way through a storm, in weather that was twenty degrees below zero.

Meanwhile, Kotoff's radio request had been received at both Seldovia and Anchorage, and Pilot Russell Merrill had set out for Ninilchic in an airplane equipped with skis, bringing with him Doctor A. D. Haverstock, government physician at Anchorage. They found Miss Howe, carried her to the plane, and returned to Anchorage, landing at night by the light of flares and automobile lights.

The accident had occurred on a Tuesday. On Sunday, Kotoff arrived, exhausted, at Seldovia, to find that, due to his prompt call for help, Miss Howe was even then lying in a hospital at Anchorage, with strong hopes of recovery.

# MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

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**OLTMER, C.**—Last heard from in Hoboken, New Jersey, in 1898. Information appreciated by H. Setje, 4335 Prairie Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.

**HARTY, WILLIAM P.**—Formerly of Chester, Vermont, and he is believed to have been a sailor on the U. S. S. "Biddle" in 1917. Important news for him. Information appreciated by Walter H. Rowe, 76 Pond Street, Ludlow, Vermont.

**GRISWOLD, MRS. ALICE.**—Was a matron in charge of the dining room at Longcliffe, Logansport, Indiana, in 1919 or 1920. A blonde. Information appreciated by a Friend, care of this magazine

**READ, RAYMOND LEO.**—Formerly of Mound City, Illinois. Was at Longcliffe, Logansport, Indiana, in 1919 or 1920. About twenty-six years old. Information appreciated by an old pal, Bill, care of this magazine.

**ZELLER, JOE.**—Last heard from in December, 1925. Your brother Charles died last spring. We are worried about you. Please write to your cousin, Mrs. Maude Wilson, 375 South 17th Street, Salem, Oregon.

**WASKALLIS, BOB** and **HARRIS.**—Last heard from in Baltimore, Maryland. Remember Bogota and St. Patrick's day. Kelly calling 31 order. Please write to me. K

**LLOYD, MARTIN J.**—Thirty-two years old. Last heard from in Los Angeles, California. Prior to this he was in Phoenix, Arizona. Family anxious to hear from him. Information appreciated by Mrs. James B. Lloyd, Route 20, Westfield, New Jersey.

**WESLEY, SLIM.**—Last heard from in 1923 at Logan, Washington. Have a surprise for you. Please write to Chris Praegitzer, Paul, Idaho.

**STANDIFERER, ANDREW.**—Black hair and blue eyes. Last heard from in California. Sad news for him. Information appreciated by Virgie Ward, Box 61, Mineral, Washington.

**PINKMAN, FREDERICK E.**—Last heard from in Seattle, Washington. Information appreciated by his cousin, Mrs. Cassie Pinkham McNally, 92 John Street, Elm Park, Staten Island, New York.

**RIDINGS, R. L.**—Last heard from in White Hall, Illinois. Information appreciated by Walter L. Talmage, 267 William Street, West Haven, Connecticut.

**DUNHAM, DON, H. F. BAKER, ROY PRINE** and **SCOTTY.**—Were flying students at Sweeney, from July to November, 1927. Please write to Walter Talmage, 267 William Street, West Haven, Connecticut.

**GEAR, DOROTHY.**—Your old pal from Cedar Rapids would like to hear from you. Please write to Pal, care of this magazine.

**HAMILTON, CARRIE.**—Formerly of Kenwood Park, Georgia. Married and moved to New York State. Please write to your first sweetheart, C., care of this magazine.

**BABY ELSIE.**—Taken from her father when she was eighteen months old. She will be sixteen years old. October 5, 1928. May have been adopted. Have news for her. Information appreciated by Uncle Jim, care of this magazine.

**ROBINSON, I. J., JR.**—Last heard from two years ago. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Helen Robinson Works, Route 1, Box 158, El Paso, Texas.

**GEMMRIG, CARL.**—Left Germany for the United States about fifty years ago with his brother. Information concerning him alive or dead appreciated by his nephew, Russell Gemmrig, General Delivery, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada.

**RITCHIE, MARSHALL MEDRITH.**—Please write at once to Geraldine Ritchie, Box 202, Elizabeth, Louisiana.

**WHITE, ALFRED.**—Formerly of Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Please let us know where you are, your sister, Daisy, Rear 121 D. Street, Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

**WILBANKS, DAVID.**—Twenty-five years old. Left home in February, 1927. Last heard from in Raleigh, North Carolina. Information appreciated by Mrs. Jessie Richards, 127 Marion Street, Laurens, South Carolina.

**STAPLES, H. G.**—Fifty years old. Left Corry, Pennsylvania, November 3, 1926. A painter. An eagle tattooed on his forearm. Sonny and I need you. Please send for us. Do not be afraid to write to Mum, care of this magazine.

**KING, SEYMOUR P.**—Please write or come to Oakland, California, before it is too late. Great sorrow has come to me and I need you. Same address on 48th Avenue, Alice G.

**KERR, O. W.**—Information concerning him appreciated by F. M., care of this magazine.

**FRANK, H. C.**—Little Sinner, why don't you write? Have said nothing and never will. All is well with the kiddies and me. I hope you are happy. Love. E.

**STEARNS, ALBERT T.**—Left Lewiston, Idaho, en route for Seattle, Washington, September 22, 1926, and has not been heard from since. Carl and others pray for you. Come home or write. Everything will be O. K. Mrs. A. E. S.

**GORDON.**—Still waiting and hoping to hear from you. Please do not disappoint us. Mother.

**RIVERS, L. C.** or **LUTHER.**—Please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

**PERRY, HARRY GUY,** or **relatives.**—Believed to have been killed in the District of Kennebeck Coal mines. He was the son of John and Anna Manda Butler Perry. Mother's family came from Oakland, Maryland. Am seventeen years old, all alone and am anxious to find my relatives. Information appreciated by Josephine Perry, West Bergen, New York.

**FINLEY, CARRIE.**—A sister of Harry Guy Perry. Last heard from in Oliver, Pennsylvania. Information appreciated by her niece, Josephine Perry, West Bergen, New York.

**WATSON, JOSEPH B.**—Formerly of Streator, Illinois. Last heard from twenty years ago. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Marguerite Huddleston, 814 South 16th Street, Springfield, Illinois.

**DUBOIS, MRS. BRUCE.**—Formerly of Cobden, Illinois. Last heard from in St. Louis, Missouri. You will hear something to your advantage if you will write to C. E. Lamond, 408 Northgrand Avenue, West, Springfield, Illinois.

**SAFFER, RALPH.**—Twenty-two years old. Last heard from about eight months ago. Believed to be in New York City. Please write to your heartbroken mother, Mrs. Saffer, 229 Wilkins Street, Rochester, New York.

**JOHNSON, CHARLES.**—Please write to your old friend, Royal Miller, 712 Lally Street, Fort Des Moines, Iowa.

**BURNS, MICHAEL J.**—Sixty-two years old. Formerly of Trafford, Pennsylvania. Last heard from in 1912. Please write to your daughter, Margaret Burns, 60 Harker Street, Mansfield, Ohio.

**KEEGAN, THOMAS.**—About forty-eight years old. Last heard from in New Jersey, five years ago. Has only one arm. Information appreciated by his niece, Margaret Burns, 60 Harker Street, Mansfield, Ohio.

**POLLOCK, MRS. ANNA.**—Last heard from fifteen years ago, when her husband passed away. Had a son, named Jimmy. Believed she married again. Information appreciated by her old friend, Sallie W., care of this magazine.

**DOWD, JESSIE.**—Last heard from at Hartford, Connecticut, where her husband was drowned. Had two daughters, Bertha and Gertrude. Information appreciated by an old friend, Sallie W., care of this magazine.

**ROBINSON, VIOLA.**—Please write to your friend, Georgina, Burger, 15 North Street, Mohawk, New York.

**GEARY, LEE R.**—Received your typewritten letter from Los Angeles, in 1925. Answered it, but my letter returned. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. L. H. Geary, care State Hospital, No. 3, Nevada, Missouri.

**DUNNING, GUS** and **TILLIE.**—Information appreciated by Virgil M. Wilson, care of this magazine.

**BEIRNES, Private WILLIAM FRANCES.**—Of the Forty-fourth Battalion, Canadian Infantry. Last heard from twenty years ago. His mother is anxious to hear from him. Information appreciated by Mrs. Samuel Willoughby, Stonewall, Manitoba, Canada.

**TRUITT, IRA or EDWARD.**—Last heard from in New York City. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Hunter, care of this magazine.

**FLOWERS, WILLIAM.**—Please write again to Box 4. E. C.

**HUMBERT, PATCH.**—Formerly of Company D, Fourth Infantry. Last heard from in July, 1927. Information appreciated by Private Otto B. Puyear, Medical Corps, U. S. Army, Fort Missoula, Montana.

**MAHER, HAROLD.**—About twenty-one years old. Last heard from in Los Angeles, California, three years ago, when he was working as an apprentice to a mason. Information appreciated by his old buddy, Private Otto B. Puyear, Medical Corps, U. S. Army, Fort Missoula, Montana.

**DAVIS, EUGENE.**—Am ill and want to see you. Please come at once. Mabel.

**LOMBERDY, CHARLES RALPH, or ANGELO, PAGNOZZI.**—Formerly of 318 East 66th Street, New York City. Last heard from April 6, 1927. Information appreciated by his wife, Mrs. C. R. Lomberdy, 2098 Eighth Avenue, New York City.

**BARNETT, A. H.**—Last heard from in 1927, in Salt Lake City, Utah. Information appreciated by Jake Praegitzer, Route 1, Paul, Idaho.

**KELLY, VANETTA.**—About twenty years old. Last heard from near Pocatello or Blackfoot, Idaho. Please write to your school chum of 1919, Jake Praegitzer, Route 1, Paul, Idaho.

**BRINK, ALLEN or ALVIN.**—Twenty-seven years old. Formerly of Freeport, Pennsylvania. Left Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in October, 1927, en route for Montana in a Chalmers sedan. Information appreciated by his pal, Melvin Smitt, 2931 Pennsylvania Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

**HAMILTON, ELMA.**—Last heard from at the Pendergast farm, Ray Brook Home, in Canada. Please write to Guy, care of this magazine.

**EASTER, ROY and CURLY.**—My father and mother. I was placed in an orphan's home on 514 Dakota Street, Kansas City, Missouri, in 1911. Information concerning my parents appreciated by Mrs. Nellie Lancaster, Maxwell, New Mexico.

**FRANK.**—Am waiting. Please come to see me or write to Nina, care of this magazine.

**REDDING, GEORGE.**—About sixty years old. Formerly of Montpelier, Indiana. Last heard from twenty years ago in Tennessee. A son of William Redding. Has a sister in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Information appreciated by A. H. Hoover, R. F. D. 5, Briston, Oklahoma.

**ANDERSON, ALBERT or ANDREW.**—Please write to Alfred Osthus, Central Alberta Sanitarium, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

**M. K. E.**—Good news from your brother. He has improved and anxious to do something for you in return for the many things you did for him when he needed you. Lyle B. Emmons, 615 East Tenth Street, Cheyenne, Wyoming.

**TAYLOR, ELIZA JANE.**—Last heard from in Indiana, in 1924. Please write to your dad, Wimer Croley, Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

**L. L. L.**—All letters and package sent to address of January 9, 1928, returned. Have nothing but cheerful news for you. Love always, L. R. H.

**WILLIAMS, LYNN.**—Last heard from in Lawn, Texas, about eight years ago. Information appreciated by Mrs. W. D. Newman, White Deer, Texas.

**CRAIG, ROBERT L.**—Thirty-five years old, bald, gray eyes, one eye has the pupil slightly injured. Last heard from in Hudson, Wyoming. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Laura M. Craig, General Delivery, Sunnyside, California.

**WARNER, RUTH.**—Left Tallulah, Louisiana, in March, 1926. Has a brother named Frank. Please write, as I have something to explain. W. D. Pierce, Box 312, Helena, Arkansas.

**TESSIER, HORMIDAS and ANTOINE.**—Last heard from in British Columbia, thirty years ago. They are brothers, and are sixty-six and sixty-eight years old, respectively. Born in De Brook, Ontario, Canada. Spend their winters in California. Information appreciated by their brother, Ephram Tessier, R. F. D. 3, Antwerp, New York.

**SEVEY, LEON E.**—Twenty-nine years old. A sawmill laborer. Mother longs for you and wants you to come home. Please write to your sister, Thelma Nye Meachem, care Rees Hotel, Walla Walla, Washington.

**KRENZIN, PAUL.**—Left his mother and sister in Hoboken, New Jersey, about forty-eight years ago and went West. Last heard from he was working in a match factory. He is about sixty-five years old. Mother's maiden name was Emma Schone. His brother, Max, went to Germany with his father. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. John Rogers, 1546 S. Fairfax Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

**ADAMS, CECIL.**—You are the only friend I have. Have not heard from you since you came to see me on So. 13, N. K. Remember I can, but I won't. Please let me hear from you. Grace, 638 North Jefferson Street, Springfield, Missouri.

**TIBBETTS, EDWARD PERRY.**—Do you care? Important news for you. Please write to A. V. H. T., care Chancy Haley, Rangeley, Maine.

**ELLIS or VAN ELLIS, JESSE R.**—About eighteen years old. Has a scar on right side of upper lip and on back of head. Last seen in Butte, Montana, in October, 1925. Information appreciated by M. Hale, 806 North Fourth Street, Burlington, Iowa.

**FAFORD, ERNEST, or relations.**—Of Quebec, Canada. Sixty-five years old. Has a brother, Leopold, living in Point de Mote, Quebec, and another brother in Montreal, Canada. Wife and son, Ernest, anxious to hear from him. Information appreciated by his son, E. E. Faford, 20 Victoria Street, Mimno Beach, Canada.

**PRATHER, THURMAND or TOM.**—Dark hair, eyes and complexion. Last heard from in June, 1927, in Bakersfield, California. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Theola Lindsey, 1712 Pear Street, Dallas, Texas.

**BRACKNEY, ROBERT.**—Sixty years old. Last heard from in Illinois about twenty-seven years ago. Information appreciated by an old friend, who is now a widow, Mrs. Leona Childester, Puxico, Missouri.

**HANSON, SADIE.**—Born in Hillsboro, N. B. Left St. Johns, N. B., in 1921. Believed to be in the United States. Information appreciated by her brother, Roy A. Hanson, care of Mrs. Annie McFarlane, Annapolis Royal, N. S.

**LLOYD, FRANCIS L.**—Last heard from in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. J. McNiel, Lufkin, Texas.

**DORLISKA, PLATO.**—Last heard from in Detroit, Michigan. Information appreciated by an old friend, M. C., care of this magazine.

**HAMILTON, NELLIE.**—Last heard from in Long Beach, in 1927. Believed to have gone East. Heard that you are in trouble. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Edith Hendricks, care Mrs. Husted, 1722 Eldorado Street, Long Beach, California.

**L. I. E.**—Who advertised for G. L. E. We are holding letters for you at this office. Please send your correct address.

**WALTER, ROSIE.**—Thirteen years old. Come home if you wish. We do not blame you. Please write to your worried mother, Mrs. Ada Walter, Box 152, Edwardsville, Illinois.

**DAVEY, ANNIE.**—Formerly of 1 Bleecker Street and 229 East Tenth Street, New York City. Your son, who was placed in an orphan's home, is anxious to hear from you. Please write to John Davey, care of Henry Coffe, South Plattsburgh, New York.

**BUNN, MYRTLE HELEN.**—Answered your ad, but letter returned. Yearning for you. Please send correct address to mother, care of this magazine.

**TRIPP, HARNEY.**—Last heard from in Kansas, about twenty years ago. Information appreciated by his sister, Ada, Mrs. G. M. Z., care of this magazine.

**MORGAN, DAVID.**—Died in Washington, Illinois, during the Civil War. Was a native of Llangyelach, North Swansea Glarn, South Wales. Would like to hear from any of his descendants. T. I. Thomas, 51 Pendarvis Street, Aberavon, Port Talbot, Glamorganshire, South Wales.

**JUSTICE, MAYNARD.**—Information appreciated by Mayme Watkins, 955 Mabel Avenue, Kirkwood, Missouri.

**DOOLEY, JAMES H.**—Pleased to receive your letter. The letters I sent to Sheridan, Wyoming, were returned. Come and see me when you come East next summer. I live one mile from the Oteen Hospital. Hope you are well and happy. Please write again to Hilda Alexander, Route 1, Swannanod, North Carolina.

**KING, JUANITA.**—Last heard from in San Antonio, Texas, in the latter part of 1926. Information appreciated by Pat H. Morris, General Delivery, Monahans, Texas.

**HEFFERN, JAMES.**—Last heard from at Barge No. 3, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Information appreciated by Harry Hill, 226 Hammond Street, Bangor, Maine.

**LARKIN, LAWRENCE.**—Last heard from in October, 1927. Please return to your grief-stricken wife, Mrs. Mae Larkin, 627 West Franklin Street, Baltimore, Maryland.

**HATCH, FRANCIS HENRY.**—Twenty-six years old. Born in England. Was stationed at Hamilton Armory, in Canada, in 1918. Last heard from at 321 East Second Street, Los Angeles, California. Information appreciated by an old friend, Dorothy Wilson, 10 McAnulty Boulevard, Hamilton, Canada.

**L., ROBERT T.**—Please write to your mother. It means so much to all of us. Mrs. C. T. Lilley of Jersey City.

**LAPINE, PHILIP.**—Baby died with gland trouble and little Albert needs you. My letters to you returned. If you do not want me let me know. Am out of funds. Marie, 415 Johnson Street, Saginaw, Michigan.

**MARTIN, WILLIAM D.**—Thirty-one years old. Last heard from in Omaha, Nebraska, in March, 1927. Believed to have gone to Peoria or Pekin, Illinois. Information appreciated by Mrs. Anton E. Hesse, Winner, South Dakota.

**ANDERSON, FREDERICK ELMER.**—Everything is all right now. You are breaking my heart. Please write to your baby, Sis, care of this magazine.

**HOWARD, CHARLES LA FAYETTE.**—Formerly of Towanda, Illinois. I. S. N. U. graduate. Last heard from in San Francisco, California. Information appreciated by an old schoolmate, George Nixon, care of this magazine.

**COWBOY.**—Do you remember the girl you were to marry in June and the fight she made to wait for you and how it ended? Your letters never came. She needs you now, and wants you, because you are the one she has always loved and been true to. Please write to her pal, care of this magazine.

**CARR, EDDIE.**—Am lonesome. I love you. Please write to Naomi, Lock Box 18, Petal, Mississippi.

**HELLBURG, ELSA, or MRS. JOHN NELSON.**—Last heard from about ten years ago when living at Winnepeg, Canada. Have important news. Please write to your cousin, Cornelia Edquist, 1597 Sixty-second Street, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

**VAN TASSEL, MARY.**—Fifty-two years old. Adopted by Mrs. Niles of Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, about forty-three years ago. Information appreciated by her sister, Mrs. F. E. Gregory, 117 Nelson Street, Battle Creek, Michigan.

**O'MALLEY, PATRICK.**—Letter received. Nothing matters. Please send for letter. Address Francis, care of this magazine.

**R. L. P.**—I was as much to blame as you. Don't blame me for what E and E did. Please write. Inez.

**RHOADES, ROBERT EMMETT.**—Was seventy-one years old, January 29, 1928. Last heard from four years ago at North Yakima, Washington. Was a cowboy years ago. Lame. His sisters, Jane and Mary Ann, are anxious to hear from him. Information appreciated by his sister, Mary A. Barnett, R. F. D., Fairmont, Minnesota.

**MOORE, CLYDE BRYAN.**—Twenty-seven years old. Son of Alex Moore, who died March 1, 1908, at Kinmundy, Illinois. He is a brother of Della, Gertie, Ruby, Pete, Fred, Dock, Ford, and Riley Moore. His mother, Mattie E. Moore, is still living. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Gertie Moore Stephens, 211 Darlington Street, La Porte, Indiana.

**LIPINSKI, J. B.**—Of the U. S. S. "Cleveland." Also soldiers and sailors who served in the United States army and navy in Samana Bay, Santo Domingo, Haiti, the West Indies, Central and South America, please write to Sailor Boy, care of this magazine.

**HALL, ZACK.**—Last heard from in Arkansas. Had a brother, William Hall, my father, deceased, and an adopted brother, James. Information concerning any of my cousins appreciated by Maude Hall Stephenson, Box 10, Toledo, Oregon.

**McDONALD, ORIE PENDEL.**—Information concerning her appreciated by Ebenezer Vining McDonald, 309 North Ninth Avenue, Marshalltown, Iowa.

**BALLEW, CHARLES J.**—Twenty-three years old. Dark hair and eyes. Last heard from in Atlanta, Georgia. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. M. L. Kinzy, Box 441, Kannapolis, North Carolina.

**BALLEW, RALPH E.**—Twenty-one years old. Blond. Last heard from in Hawaii, in 1925, when he was on the U. S. S. "Chateau Thierry." Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. M. L. Kinzy, Box 441, Kannapolis, North Carolina.

**BALLEW, R. HURSHEL.**—Nineteen years old. Dark hair and eyes. Last heard from when en route to Washington, District of Columbia, in 1925. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. M. L. Kinzy, Box 441, Kannapolis, North Carolina.

**BLAGDON, RUTH.**—Last heard from at 33 Central Avenue, South Portland, Maine. Please write to William Watkins, Dolliver, Iowa.

**JEHOSWSKI, JOE.**—Twenty-nine years old. Formerly lived in Corinth, Montana. Served in the Canadian army during the World War. Last heard from in Smoky River Valley, British Columbia, Canada, in 1920, when he was working with a surveying crew. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Mary Jehowski, 919 Wilter Lane, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

**WILT, GEORGE.**—Last heard from in Memphis, Tennessee. Information concerning him or his relatives appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Beatrice Andrews, 542 East Third Street, Sedalia, Missouri.

**SPILKER, MAY.**—A niece of Clint Chase and lived with her grandmother, Mrs. Hanna Chase, in Lovington, Illinois, in 1882. Information appreciated by S. D. Butler, Route 1, Box 37, Oronogo, Missouri.

**CHASE, DAVID CLINTON.**—Formerly of Lovington, Illinois. Believed to have gone to Texas. Information appreciated by S. D. Butler, Route 1, Box 37, Oronogo, Missouri.

**CHARLES.**—Must go to court to gain custody of Dorothy. We both love you and want to be with you when things are settled. My letters to you returned. Please write to us. Your loving wife, Gladys B.

**BURTON, CHARLES S. C.**—A magazine salesman and automobile mechanic. Left arm badly scarred. Last heard from in Mason City, Iowa, in June and July, 1927. Intended to go to Minnesota. Information appreciated by G. B., care of this magazine.

**MOORE, HATTIE.**—My mother, who was separated from my father when I was a few weeks old. This was in 1905. My father married again, and I have always lived with him. Information concerning my mother appreciated by Mrs. Marjorie Eleanor Gruber Morris, care of Mrs. Murphy, 101 West Sixty-eighth Street, New York City.

**ALLSOPP, GEOFFREY.**—Twenty-four years old. Blond. Last heard from in Wegburn, in January, 1922. Information appreciated by his anxious mother, Mrs. D. Scott, 129 Harriett Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

**MENDENHALL, CORA and OSCAR.**—Please write to an old friend, E. M. E., 528 North Elder Avenue, Indianapolis, Indiana.

**BATES, JIM.**—Last heard from in Pond Creek, Kentucky. Please write to your friend, who needs you, M. L., care of this magazine.

**SIMPSON, W. E., or BILL.**—Last heard from in 1925. Was a forest ranger in California. Information appreciated by Mrs. Rena Thorp, care of S. F. Tipton, Route 1, Farwell, Texas.

**WEAK, LLOYD D.**—Last heard from in Montana, in January, 1913. Information appreciated by his brother, Eugene H. Weak, 196 Park Boulevard, Marion, Ohio.

**LUCAS, E. L.**—Please come home at once. Your mother is not well. Your father, A. M. Lucas, Randlett, Oklahoma.

**MORRISON, EARL.**—Last heard from in Salt Lake City, Utah. Believed to have gone to Denver, Colorado. Have been trying to locate you for years. Please write to your old friend, Orson Teasdale, 1203 Iola Avenue, Salt Lake City, Utah.

**KAUFFMAN, LEE HAROLD.**—Mildred and daddy are worried. Please write to Aunt Mamie, care of this magazine.

**KAUFFMAN, EPHRAIM.**—Last heard from in Brush, Colorado. Please write to your Sister Mayme, care of this magazine.

**JONES, CASEY or EDWARD.**—Was a steel worker on Coo's Bay Bridge and on the Interstate Bridge between Vancouver and Portland. Please write to E. M. J., care of this magazine.

**COOPER, JACK.**—Last heard from in Toronto, Canada, and Detroit, Michigan, in 1926-27. Bobbie and Jackie need you. Please write or come back to England. F.

**COMPTON, ROBERT, and daughter, CORA LEE.**—Last heard from in Oklahoma in October, 1926. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Lela Page, General Delivery, Lomita, California.

**PRINCE, JUANITA.**—Barytone and rifle shot, of Oklahoma. Traveled at one time with Al. Peck's Medicine Show. Please write to Guy O. Glazier, El Cajon, California.

**MARIE, ETHEL and WARDIE.**—Please write to me. Floyd J. Kirk, care Bert Kirk, Shelton, Washington.

**PETE, BUD S.**—No hard feelings. Dad failing rapidly. Please write home. Pat Howells, Rock Springs, Wyoming.

**PERRY, JOHN or JENNY, MRS. MATILDA LAVALLIE, and JOE BELLIBEAU.**—Residents of Providence, Rhode Island, or Boston, Massachusetts. The daughter of Peter Perry, deceased, would like to have your addresses, as letters to you have been returned. Mrs. H. Brooks, 114-15 Ninety-second Street, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

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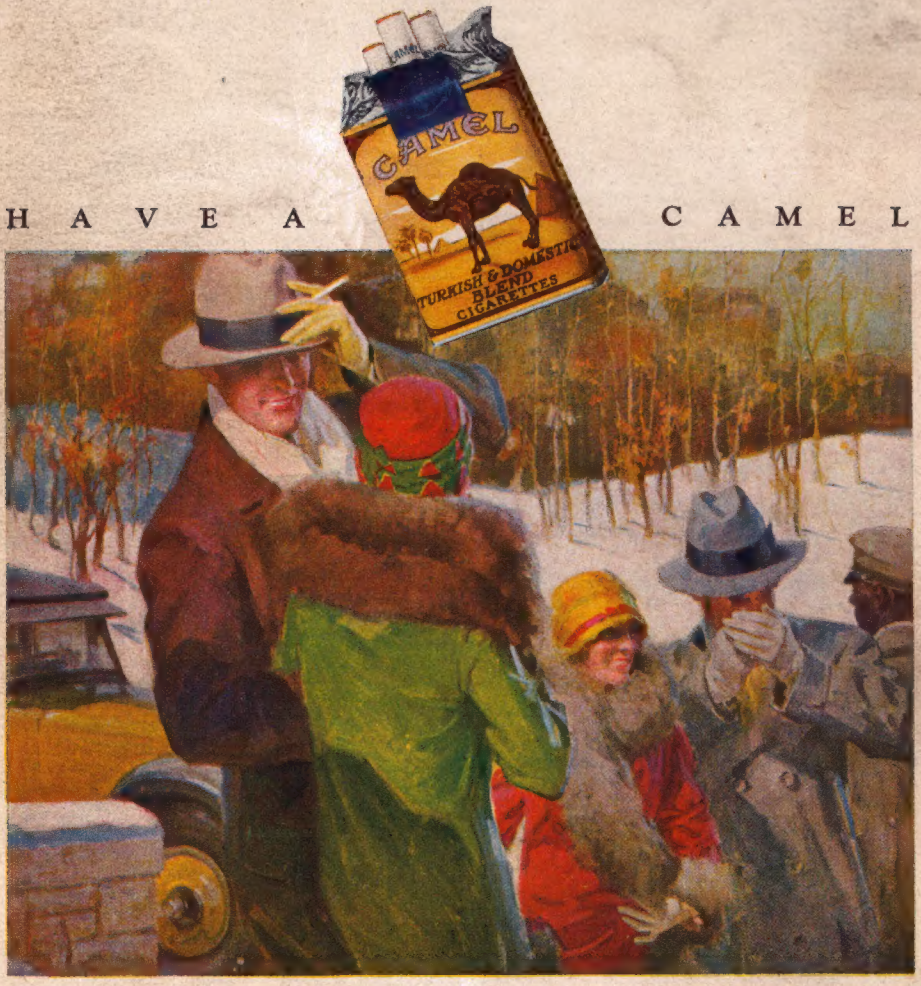


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